A Man's Conscience

AVERY MACALPINE

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[See page 97.]

A MAN'S CONSCIENCE

A Novel

BY

AVERY MACALPINE

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ILLUSTRATIONS.

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A MAN'S CONSCIENCE.

CHAPTER I.

A LEVEL plain of waving grain stretched westward to the setting sun; a monotonous gray-green illimitable expanse, with few trees to shade or bushes to break the even surface. Scarcely an undulation in the green plain served to vary the tiresome stretch. One could believe that the sea of bearded stalks bent and raised their heads again without limit all the way between the wheat-farm of Sandy Alistair and the ocean hundreds of miles away.

Yet where the horizon dipped to meet the dim distance of the plain there might have been discerned on a clear day deeper shadows and an irregular line. There the earth rose in varying vistas that betokened shadowy hills and open wide valleys lying between. But at that distance from the farm the outline was indistinct, and melted into what could easily have been mistaken for low-lying clouds.

A low-roofed frame house with rambling outbuildings stood somewhere near the centre of vast

wheat-fields, and served as a focus for the eye in all that waste of waving green. A few stunted trees stood behind the house—possibly an offshoot of one of the pine-belts that intersect the State at irregular intervals. But that was before civilization had marched so far and marched so rapidly with its plough and pruning-hook; to-day there scarce remains an unmolested glade to whisper of what that Western world was before man hewed and sowed and reaped its broad lands.

Much of the primitive grandeur has departed with the introduction of modern cultivation; the mechanical tilling of the soil, the throbbing plough, and whirling reaper have almost obliterated the memory of those past silent days.

Besides the dwarfed growth—now for the most part represented by stumps or skeleton branches—that stood at no great distance from the dwelling, there was also a young plantation of hardy trees, planted and coaxed into comparative thriftiness by Sandy's fostering care; but aside from this there was little attempt at variety in the culture of the soil.

Approaching to the very threshold itself there was, to be sure, a field of rapidly growing potato-vines; in a limited space to the left some of the commoner sorts of garden vegetables throve, the long runners of beans predominating, either from some latent faith in their ultimate yield, or because they had the habit of growing without asking attention or exacting care. Everywhere else the

long shafts of the heavy-headed grain grew almost to the very door of the house. Even the road that led to the grassy plain beyond had been made by trampling down the young wheat and cutting a way through its broken blades of tender springing green.

Each separate stalk had its equivalent in coveted "cash," as Sandy Alistair was wont to remark, and so there could be no sentiment wasted in improving and extending the clearing around the house. Indeed, it seemed possible that sentiment had stopped short at that wooden structure itself. No flower of fancy had been allowed to adorn its severe construction. It closely resembled in outline some of the first efforts at representation that Sandy remembered to have essayed in those far-off days in New England, when with slate and pencil he had laboriously acquired the rudiments of what he was pleased to term his education.

Happily, education in its broader sense is not confined to Murray or the higher mathematics, else Sandy perhaps would have fallen short of any standard upheld by the schools. Albeit he had not in those days drawn on his smudgy slate to no purpose four straight walls, with an outlined door set impartially in the centre, equally well-planned windows of four panes each, all surmounted by a peaked roof that had a tendency to lean threateningly from the perpendicular. As near as memory could reproduce this childish effort in architecture, the house had raised in the midst of the

boundless plain, leaving the cabin which Sandy had first reared to fulfil the utilitarian office of washhouse or other adjunct.

An unexpected improvement to the severe simplicity of his first plan had of late been added to the frame building, fundamentally the result of the exigencies of the climate, but more directly the outgrowth of unceasing importunity on the part of Sandy's only child, Millicent. She had pleaded in every tone known to wheedling womanhood that a "piazza" was necessary to her further equable existence; that, indeed, she urged, there was at present no place fit to sit in; that the kitchen was intolerable; that her bedroom was hot and stuffy; and that their joint living-room, which also answered the requirements of her father's nightly repose, was no longer to be endured.

Sandy sighed. This possibly was the outcome of sending his daughter to a boarding-school in their nearest large city, where she had passed the greater part of the last three years. These presumably were the ideas instilled by those purveyors of learning and polish to whom he had intrusted the education of his child. It was lamentable the false notions of life and luxury that were imbibed along with Smith's Geography and a rudimentary knowledge of the use of the pianoforte.

This instrument, the epitome of freehanded indulgence, Sandy had purchased at great outlay on the occasion of a visit to St. Paul's to fetch his daughter home after her last term at school.

Sandy looked upon the selection and removal of Millicent's piano to their distant home as an event worthy of a place in the State chronicles. The ways and means for its accomplishment had cost him several sleepless nights, but had at length been achieved. The piano now stood in the corner of the large front room, covered with a black india rubber covering, and conveying in outward appearance about the same idea of cheer that the contemplation of an undertaker's window suggests.

The question of adding a verandah to the house had been raised by Milly soon after her return from school, but the consideration of further outlay had not met with any very pronounced approval on the part of her father.

"Y' were born in this house and brung up here, and never see the necessity of settin' anywhars but in the kitchen or the big room or the doorstep. What notion's got inter your pretty head down to St. Paul's as to make you discontented with your old home?" he asked, with a questioning look at his daughter, as though longing to penetrate this new phase of her development.

She did not answer directly, but on her way through the room she stooped—with one arm thrown round his thin shoulders, clothed with the loose-throated flannel shirt he wore—and kissed him.

"I sw'ar," he ejaculated after she had gone, "if that thar golden-headed, rosy-cheeked, blue-eyed baby hasn't al'ays had her own way with me! I've

never held my own with her, never since the fust streak of light fell across her blessed face lyin' in the cradle I hollered out for her 'fore she was born. And when her mother was took so soon, it did seem to me that no baby's fingers in all this world ever got such a tight grip on a man's heart as them little pink ones did."

Sandy got up and changed to another hard wooden chair, while he exclaimed impatiently:

"Psha'! she'll have her own way; that piazza is as good as built, so far as I can jedge. I might as well ride over and get Smithies to come and lend a hand. The sooner it's done the sooner I'll forget what a blame fule that girl makes o' me with her wheedlin' ways and her 'Please, daddy,' and her kisses, and the Lor' knows what!"

Sandy shook himself impatiently, and strode out through the kitchen.

Seeing Milly standing on the threshold, tall, graceful, shapely, his intent took the form of resolve; as he passed her he remarked a bit shamefacedly:

"I guess I'll ride over to the Cross Roads 'fore it gets any hotter. Want anything?"

She again did not answer him directly, but this time put both her arms around his neck, saying softly, "You dear old daddy!"

Soon after, as he was tightening the girth about Winona, the strains of an inspiriting waltz were borne out to him through the open window, awakening a pleased smile of inward satisfaction that

lighted his faded eyes and softened the many deep-set lines of his thin bronzed face.

Millicent played on; she was enjoying the piazza in prospective, and also, with characteristic femininity, the small triumph of her well-conceived plan.

That evening, as Sandy threw himself out of the saddle, flinging the bridle to a boy standing lazily watching his return, he forgot to give the customary instructions regarding the mare's fodder and stabling. His mind was evidently preoccupied with some train of thought that excluded even the expected reference to the lad's good-for-nothing habits of supreme laziness.

Rarely did Jim escape some good-natured gibe from his master on such occasions.

"Lor'," the boy ejaculated, as Sandy left him abruptly, "what's ever come to the boss? 'Tain't of'en he lets a feller off's light's this. He must a' heerd some news or 'nother to make him in sech a bustle."

But whatever might have been the cause of Sandy's abstraction, it did not wear off at once—not when he had kissed his daughter, nor when Hannah, the housekeeper and valuable woman of all work, had placed before him his supper of cold boiled beef and the good-sized loaf whose quality she greatly prided herself upon.

"'Pears like as tho' y'd lost yer appetite," she remarked sententiously, glancing at the table, and observing the food scarcely tasted. "Hope you

hev'n't been sp'ilin' yer stummick with them nasty dram-drinkin's the settlement's beset with. The Lord 'll snatch up the Cross Roads or burn it with brimstone 'fore long, jest to keep the plague from spreadin'," Hannah continued. Her view of the omnipotence of Providence was, it cannot be denied, a somewhat material one, and had little in common with more advanced theories of natural development. If He saw fit to make an example of the Cross Roads by wiping it out of existence with one clean stroke of supernatural power, Hannah was not the one to deny the lesson implied in the miracle. The temptations that rendered the small settlement attractive to many of the dwellers in the scattered houses of the farmers were all in her eyes dangerous, if not damning. She did not believe that any visitor to that region escaped without yielding to its allurements, even if escaping actual contamination.

Although she would have answered with her life for Sandy's sound judgment and consequent well-doing, she could not nevertheless resist using upon him the lash of her suspicions when commenting on his rare visits to the little hamlet.

"Like as not you felt kinder tuckered out arter yer ride, and visited them s'loons rather too of'en," she remarked.

Sandy had no thought of rebuking the woman as she cleared away the meal and tidied the room. He was too well accustomed to her pessimistic views of humanity in general, and of his own short-

comings in particular, to attempt any defence or give more than a passing word in reply. He sat for some time in silence, smoking his pipe, with his chair tilted back against the wall, and his chip hat pulled well down over his ears. A few straggling locks of gray hair showed beneath the broad-brimmed hat, and some fell forward at the sides, mingling with the unkempt beard and whiskers.

His features were well defined, and not without a certain attraction of form and outline. But they, like the whole man, had been modified and altered during his life of toil in a climate of quickly varying extremes. Deep lines furrowed his brow and sat in well-defined wrinkles about his thin lips, which even his unshaven beard failed altogether to conceal; his eyes were so light in shade that it would have been difficult to define their original color, but the expression was pleasing, and often caught some fire from the quizzical smile that lighted them. Like many persons who pass the greater part of life separated from ready intercourse with men and their requirements, his face held a reserved passivity that was well-nigh impenetrable. Where a nature is left to almost exclusive self-communing, few passions chase one another through the slow moving brain, leaving the impress of what we term expression. One thought gives place to another with sluggish deliberation, showing no sign of conflict. Physical changes leave this mark in time on all flesh, but their inroad, as in the case of Sandy Alistair,

comes rather from without than from within. The rain and the frost and the sun had more to do with the ploughing of deep lines in his impassive countenance than any quickly varying emotions of inward consciousness.

He would sometimes sit for hours in his daughter's company without exchanging half-a-dozen words with her. Not that this precluded an absorbing interest on his part in her lightest word, nor a cheerful unrestrained confidence on hers. Where one is eighteen, with a perfect physical organization, no very marked ambitions and few cares, it is easy to find subjects for endless monologues.

On this occasion there was the much-anticipated alteration in the house which demanded a running commentary from Milly. There was also the description of Jim's accident with the reaping machine, which had in some way caught his hand and left him the worse by the top of a finger. Then, too, there was the "buggy," Millicent's especial property, which needed revarnishing. "It was now not fit to be seen," she explained, but to be seen by whom was not explained; for except to carry her to the nearest railway station, or on very infrequent visits to the store at the Cross Roads, or now and then to visit a neighbor at a distance, the light wagon in question rarely was seen of men. Indeed, the buggy was almost the sole outlay that Sandy had made for his daughter that he genuinely regretted. "Her schoolin' had come heavy," he

often reflected, but then there was some evidence of gain to be observed in this use of his hardly won dollars. "He had had his day for l'arnin', and 'twasn't no more'n right that Milly should have hers." And then he liked, although he didn't confess it, the little superior young-lady airs which she had taken on in the distant city. Even the modish gowns she wore, and the towering pile of her befrizzed blond hair, were all a source of silent pride to the man who built all his hopes and expended all his love upon this exacting young daughter.

The piano, as he well knew, was an extravagance; but he had himself in former days performed on the accordion, and even now would upon occasion draw from its wind-expanded sides some strained notes suggestive of his lasting lament for "Lily Dale." "The Soldier's Joy," too, had proved his own on more than one occasion, when its notes had served to banish Hannah with her grumbling comments concerning the things of this world and her gloomy forebodings regarding those of a future one.

Yes; he knew the power of music, and did not regret yielding to Milly's demand for an expensive pianoforte. But the buggy was a different matter. There were several acres of wheat thrown to the dogs, he metaphorically reflected. "What was the use of spendin' money to set that light-topped consarn up in the barn for the chickens to roost on?"

But it was characteristic of his self-denying love for his daughter that he never had expressed this opinion in her hearing, nor had she the least idea of her father's estimate of his investment.

To-night Sandy did not rouse himself to answer directly the question of renewed varnish, but contented himself with an occasional punctuation of assent to his daughter's prolonged dissertation. Finally he rose, shaking the ashes from his pipe, and saying with a yawn that he guessed he would "turn in."

This was a signal for Milly's retirement; but before she left the room her father turned to her, looking over his shoulder as he still idly tapped the empty pipe against the chimney-piece, and observed:

"I'm thinkin' some of ridin' over to Sydney's farm to-morrow mornin'; I hear thar's a new feller took persession. I'd like to take a look round, and see what's in the wind. Guess I'll be off 'fore you're up, little 'un. Good night."

"All right," Milly comprehensively assented, and, adding a sleepy "Good night," disappeared up the steep stairs that led to her own small room above.

"'I'm thinkin' some of ridin' over to Sydney's farm to-morrow mornin'.'"

CHAPTER II.

One morning a few weeks later, Milly sat in the full enjoyment of the desired verandah. She had placed her rocking-chair in the shadiest angle of its extent, and now was swaying herself backwards and forwards in the uninterrupted possession of its solitude.

Her father had summed up his contempt for such modern luxury by calling the verandah "a new-fangled fixin'." When not employed away from the house, he spent his time as usual sitting on the back-door step smoking.

The waves of green that had stretched in monotonous expanse when Milly had returned to the farm in June were now turned to golden billows that filled the landscape as far as the eye could reach. A shimmering veil of heat obscured the distance, and shut out the slight undulation in the line of the horizon that on a clear day served to rest the vision.

It seemed to Milly, as she rocked and fanned herself gazing out on the broad waste, as though she dwelt enchained by some mystical enchantment alone on a tiny island in the midst of this golden sea. She felt that a spell had been woven around her whose power she was conscious of, and

yet whose magic she was unable to resist. With her eyes half closed, and the dreamy drowsiness of the day creeping over her, she lost all realization of her surroundings. The unpainted floor with the "lean-to" roof above, melted and merged into something more beautiful than she had ever seen except in dreams. The plain of ripening grain became an enchanted sea that broke noiselessly at her feet, inviting her to venture the small craft in which she rocked on its alluring vastness. Who knew what lay beyond? A prince or a kingdom, perhaps. Who could tell?

The thin veil of the atmosphere grew denser; she could not penetrate its meshes or see behind the fairy film that limited the view and shut her in with shimmering softness. In half-consciousness she realized that this was a day-dream, but ah, how beautiful! She settled herself again with partly closed eyes, hoping that other visions might be revealed if she but yielded herself to the beckoning dream. But the spell was broken almost with the thought. She could see nothing now except so many acres of wheat ready for the reaping. As she beheld again the unadorned uprights that held the slanting roof above her she was no longer deluded as to the rough execution of even this her most cherished desire. Her rocking-chair, a real "Boston," and hitherto a treasured possession, sank to the level of a "common painted chair with an ugly calico cushion."

Her own cool dress of pale blue print looked

contemptible as she remembered the costumes of costly materials worn by expensively dressed women in that ideal city of her remembrance. The sound of Hannah's heavy tread as she moved about her household toil, her deep-toned nasal intonation as she reproved Jim or hustled the cat, seemed by contrast to Milly's awakened senses many degrees more aggravating than ever before.

Was she doomed forever to the farm ? she asked herself. What did her present life promise but deadening monotony and unendurable solitude? Whom had she to exchange a word with from week's end to week's end except her father, whose interests revolved around the probable number of bushels to the acre, and the fluctuations of the wheat market in Chicago?

To be sure, he was always kind and affectionate, yielding unselfishly to her slightest whim, and indulging her far beyond what she deserved or had a right to expect. She loved him, she said, dear old man ! But what had they in common ? Even his appearance was grotesque in the extreme if she compared him with the well-dressed fathers of her school friends. And as to his speech, it was certainly far from correct, according to the rules laid down in grammar. She repeated again that he was a dear old father, and that she loved him above all things.

But the spell was broken. The earth was no longer an enchanted place, where miles of prosaic wheat changed to gold at the touch of magic

imagination. It was only a crop ready for the harvest, and brought endless inconveniences. During the next few weeks the house would be overrun with "hands" from the Cross Roads, hired to assist in reaping and threshing the grain.

These were coarse, often brutal, men, with uncouth manners, whose speech from habit was punctuated with ingenious oaths of constant repetition. Even the presence of the "boss's" daughter did not always serve to hold them in check.

No; the life here was certainly very uninteresting. Ah—she stretched her clasped hands above her head—where was the good fairy who, by a touch of her wand, could change all this? She smiled at the remembrance of her dream, and wished with all her heart that she might blot out her dull surroundings by a return to that congenial life of imagined beauty.

Her half-whimsical imagery had nevertheless somewhat prepared her for the unexpected. As she let her hands drop again listlessly in her lap, she was scarcely astonished at hearing an unknown voice speaking at a little distance, and asking in a pleasant tone if the person to whom the voice belonged "had the honor of addressing Miss Alistair?"

The speaker stood at the corner of the verandah. As Milly rose he advanced towards her, holding his hat in his hand. He had a pleasant face, she thought, different from any she had seen before. She had learned from her father some time before

that the new-comer at Sydney's was a young Englishman; and now, although she had heard no description of him, she at once decided that her visitor was their neighbor on the adjoining farm.

He was tall, with broad shoulders and well-developed physique, singularly unlike any one she remembered to have met. His shapely head was set on a well-formed throat left exposed by the open collar of his flannel shirt. His face was burned as a fair skin will burn until long-repeated exposure has tanned it to an even brown. But his brow was fair as an infant's, and almost as devoid of lines. His blue eyes were well set, and looked out smilingly from under straight brows, while his closely-cut beard and moustache failed to hide the pleasant smile that came readily to his lips.

Milly had never seen such an embodiment of perfectly developed manhood.

Her types, to be sure, had not been varied. They included for the most part the familiar thin and wiry make of which her father was the acknowledged example. Besides this, she had known one or two well-dressed, keen-faced youths with restless eyes, and an eagerness of expression that indicated a cause for their somewhat angular outline. Hitherto this irreproachably dressed young man, with immaculate gloves and the latest novelty in walking-sticks, had filled the place of Milly's ideal hero. During the few moments in which she stood silently contemplating her visitor, the ideal of her girlish fancy faded, never to be revived again.

As Milly had made no reply to the question concerning her identity, unless it were the slightest possible inclination of her pretty head, the young man proceeded without embarrassment to introduce himself.

"I am Godfrey Alleyne," he explained pleasantly, "your new neighbor. You might, perhaps, have heard your father speak of me? I live at Sydney's, don't you know. I've come over to manage my farm myself, and see a little life in the West."

"Yes, I've heard of you," Milly replied briefly; but as the blue eyes of the young man seemed to find pleasant occupation in resting upon her, without recourse to further speech, she asked somewhat abruptly, "Do you like it?"

"Yes, very much," Godfrey replied, still smiling; but he made no attempt to enumerate the reasons for his enjoyment of what he designated the West.

"My father has spoken of you," Milly began. "He said there was a young Englishman who had come out to try fancy farming, but he guessed—" She stopped abruptly, the color rising quickly to her fresh young face.

"What did he guess?" asked Godfrey amusedly. "I should be immensely pleased if you would tell me Mr. Alistair's opinion of my venture. Tell me," he urged, leaning nearer to her as he placed one foot on the low floor of the verandah, while the other still kept its place on the dry grass.

She looked at him mischievously as she finished

her interrupted sentence. "He said he guessed—you'd go back."

"Ah, possibly. I'm not so sure. Some things I like awfully out here. Not the heat," he added, taking a handkerchief from his pocket, which he suggestively passed across his brow. "It's the hottest place I ever was in," he continued. "I wouldn't have believed there was such a burning, drying, scorching heat to be found anywhere—where I want to go."

"Ah," rejoined Milly mockingly, "you think yourself very good, I suppose. You probably have never committed any sins that may not be expiated by coming to Minnesota."

"Ah, I don't say that! I deserve worse than this, I assure you," Godfrey replied.

"But there are punishments of cold as well as of heat, you must remember," continued Milly, remembering something she had once read. "Wait till the winter comes, and you are literally frozen in your house, and unable to stir an inch from home on account of the drifts. When the snow reaches to the second-story windows, and for forty days the mercury never rises above zero—when the wind blows the fine snow into every crevice, and no covering even of furs will keep it out—then you'll have added something, maybe, to your experience of what you deserve."

Godfrey laughed outright. This at least was a new experience. He had not hitherto known what it was to be confronted by a fair-faced girlish men-

tor, who met him with the outspoken frankness of a child, but united therewith a dignity of manner and grace of person wholly unique in his experience.

His estimate of the gentler sex had sustained a distinct modification since his acquaintance with his new home, and an association with what appeared to him a distinctly novel type. There was something unexpected in recognizing as equals the hard-working thrifty class that seemed the very stamina of womankind in the neighborhood. He had been inclined at first to take an amused, if not a supercilious, view of the matrons and maids with whom he came in contact. Their entire disregard of his superior attitude or their half-gibing recognition of his unexpressed opinion had done much to throw a truer light on their self-denying lives. He had learned more clearly than his easy-going life had hitherto shown that a rough exterior does not always indicate indifference to finer feelings, nor does ignorance always go hand in hand with uncultured speech.

Godfrey had had much to learn in the few weeks since his arrival. His present attitude of interested scrutiny was, he thought, but another endeavor to better comprehend the various phases of the New World.

To be sure, he acknowledged to himself that there was more pleasure to be found in the study of this exceptionally pleasing young girl than he had yet experienced in like investigations. She

certainly was not of the type left behind by his predecessor at Sydney's, and described by that personage "as a right slap-down smart gurl for all kinds of work," nor did he find any suggestion of the varied though pronounced types met with on his journey westward. A number of thoughts passed through his mind in the moment of silence that had fallen between them—all more or less poetic, and as a rule far removed from his usual practical comparisons. The delicate tint of a sea-shell, the heavenly blue of cornflowers, nodding fields of ripened corn—all rose in his mind and united themselves as fitting suggestions of the girl's beauty. Even the quaint phraseology of her simplest speech seemed to him becoming, and to be expected in this treasure of the prairie. It would have spoiled her quite, he thought, had she spoken with the commonplace accuracy of ordinary women. Something piquant in the turn of her full red lips, something indescribable in her deprecatingly lifted brows, lent point to her half-uttered questions and interest to her simplest replies.

Godfrey felt inclined to prolong the interview. The primary cause of his visit had, indeed, quite escaped him. The important advice he had intended to solicit from Mr. Alistair had by this time lost some of its importance. After all, life is long enough for all practical purposes, and it would be folly to sacrifice an interview that promised at least change, if not piquancy, for the sake of better understanding the mysteries of

husbandry. That could wait, he concluded. Mr. Alistair was certainly original and withal amusing, but his daughter promised even a more entertaining field for observation. He must not miss this opportunity of becoming better acquainted with her.

His resolve found an echo in his companion's half-formed desire. She had no wish to shorten what promised a welcome interlude in her monotonous existence. Some slight impress of her waking dream was still upon her; through the indistinct memory of its beguilement there flashed the reason for her subsequent discontent. No prince had come to deliver her! The picture of her imagination had remained uncrowned. After all, reality was almost better than dreaming. Then she had known, even although she would not acknowledge it, that she would awake and find the humble home with unpicturesque details her only background. Now upon this very home which she had almost despised a living interest had dawned.

The morning was no longer oppressively hot; indeed there must have been a slight breeze springing up; for, rising and falling, came that indescribable sound of the waving plain as though a whisper had started far out on the misty horizon, that every bending stalk must carry to its neighbor and then whisper back again, until the last faint breath died in the unseen distance.

The shelter of the little plantation looked invit-

ing. Milly wondered if her guest would prefer it to the heated steps of the verandah where he was now seated. She suggested a change to the more tempting shade. A swing hung from the branches of one of the larger trees, and in this she balanced herself with her hands far upstretched on the ropes; with her small feet resting on the ground in front of her she pushed the swing gently backwards and forwards. Godfrey stood leaning against the tree looking down at her.

"It's not very pretty about here," she began, hesitatingly; "not what you are used to, I suppose. England is mighty fine, I have read. I've always wished I could see a country that didn't burn up one-half of the year and freeze the rest. It must be nice to walk in the cool lanes and over fields that keep green summer and winter. It must seem almost like the Garden of Eden. I wonder why any one should come here from choice?"

"Yes, it is jolly, awfully jolly; but one can't stop at home forever," Godfrey replied, "especially when you are only one among many, and not much missed. Besides, there's more to learn in a new country, more development, more expansion, more new ideas, and—push," he added, by way of culmination to what was for him a rather long and consecutive speech.

"Is there?" she asked wonderingly. "I should never have imagined that any of these things existed here. It seems to me that a more dead

than alive place couldn't be found than our State." She spoke, however, of this especial portion of the commonwealth with that accent of personal responsibility that seems a characteristic of the nation. The tone was apologetic, but evidently awaited a disclaimer on the part of her listener. She was not disappointed.

"Contrast is the very spice of existence," he remarked. "One would be blind not to perceive the advantages of a great free land like this, even if brought up in the traditions of, and bound by loyalty to, a more conservative country."

Milly held very indistinct views concerning the government of any people beyond the area of the United States, and at this moment, with true womanly subterfuge, evaded the exigency of further discussion by a direct question that placed the burden of reply upon her companion.

Just then, too, she heard her father's high-pitched voice calling to her from the doorstep: "Milly, Milly child, ain't you going to have no dinner to-day? Whar are you? Down in the swing, I do declar'; and O—why, to be sure, Mr. Alleyne! Pleased to see you, sir. Walk right in and make yourself at home. What's mine is yourn, so long as you care to help yourself, and don't you forget it," Sandy added, hospitably, at the same time giving Godfrey a resounding slap on the shoulder. "Hanner," he called, "Hanner, set another plate on the table, and fetch up a cha'r. Mr. Alleyne, glad to see you, and hope you won't

"'*Good-bye, Miss Alistair,*' *he said;* '*thank you for a delightful day.*'"

mind my not being at home to talk over business with you when you fust come."

Godfrey didn't mind, he replied; and Sandy continued, "It's a pity you're so new to the work, jest as harvestin's comin' on. Does make consid'able diff'runce in the way the hands take hold. If they see you're a greenhorn they'se likely to take advantage of you and skulk work about half the time. It will be with them suthin' like the old rhyme we used to say as children, 'Under the haystack, fast asleep'—eh, Milly?"

She smiled in reply, but some subtle change in her mobile face caused Sandy to look again at his daughter before resuming the entertainment of their visitor.

The unreflecting innocence that had rendered her expression almost like that of a guileless child had somehow assumed a different tone, born of new emotions. Her blue eyes still reflected every passing light and shade, but showed beneath the deeper hue of hidden waters. For the first time in her life she had been brought face to face with an existence that held for her all the attraction of the unknown. The cultivated voice, the innate good manners, the well-chosen dress, even the strong, finely-formed hands and carefully-shaped nails of the young man did not escape Milly's observation. In contrast she beheld the bent shoulders and slouching form of her father, his hands horny with continual labor, and sometimes

guiltless of the beauty of cleanliness; his grizzled locks and aquiline features; they seemed to her by contrast almost unlovely. Hannah, never very comely, appeared doubly unattractive, and the "help" who shared their meals intolerable. She almost wondered at Godfrey's easy good-nature, and the matter-of-course way in which he accepted their homely fare and endured their uncouth manners.

But he seemed singularly pleased with every one, not excepting Hannah, to whose sharp tongue he found replies that turned away even her chronic wrath.

The dinner ended, Milly only saw Godfrey again for a few minutes as he was mounting to ride away. She stood in the back doorway, framed round with a blossoming creeper that clung to the ugly unpainted posts. Her hands were full of trailing branches of wild roses she had gathered among the stumps and tangle of bushes that grew at the back of the house. Over her shining hair she had tied with a blue ribbon a coarse chip hat similar to that her father wore. Now it had fallen back, and was held only by the knot under her chin. Before mounting, Godfrey came up to her, holding out his hand pleasantly to take hers.

"Good-bye, Miss Alistair," he said; "thank you for a delightful day. I've enjoyed my visit very much. I like the West better than ever; I

wouldn't be surprised if I liked it better than the Garden of Eden, after all."

"There's not much danger of that, I guess," she said, as she stood beside her father, seeing him ride away.

CHAPTER III.

The ride home promised to be one of pleasure to Godfrey. The long twilight of the summer's night was by far the most enjoyable part of the whole twenty-four hours. As he rode for miles under a cloudless sky, lighted only by the faint flicker of scattered stars, he felt an exuberant gladness, born of youth and hope encountering a new and untried existence.

The after-glow of the setting sun still lingered in the western sky, and shot long white rays almost to the zenith. The air had become cool with heavy dew, and from the beaten track of dry herbage over which he rode rose a faint fresh odor like that of trampled flowers. His horse felt fresh, and possibly enjoyed the rushing gallop in the night air as much as his master, for on they went in perfect accord, leaving mile upon mile behind them.

Godfrey's farm lay to the south, and could be reached in an almost direct line if the highway were avoided and the prairie tracks alone the guide. But when about nine miles from Sandy's farm he turned off at right angles, with the intention of visiting the post-office at the Cross Roads.

This detour would make considerable difference

in the distance to be traversed, but the night was beautiful, and the ride exhilarating; besides, he did not know when he might be able to take the journey again.

To-night he seemed to experience a new zest in everything pertaining to his present life, that stirred his pulses and rendered him oblivious to fatigue or the solitude of his ride. On and on under the quiet stars, not a sound far or near save the soft fall of his horse's feet. On and on, until the straggling lights of the settlement showed in the distance. Passing scattered houses, where the rays of a single candle blinked from narrow windows or open doorways, soon he had arrived at the main house of the single street. Throwing the bridle to a lounger standing near, he entered the low building that served as store and post-office for the little community. This was also the general lounging-place of the neighborhood, and whatever tit-bit of gossip reached its door did not depart for want of welcome.

Godfrey had visited the place before, but the unsavory atmosphere of foul tobacco, and other odors equally objectionable though less easily described, the indolent gaze or more personal presumption of its inmates, the ready oaths of the groups of gossiping idlers, had all filled him with a sense of repugnance difficult to overcome. He sent at no very long intervals for his mail, and aside from that necessity the village post-office held for him no interest.

But if the denizens of this uninviting resort were unknown to him, his own affairs, and even his personal appearance, were not matters of equal indifference to them. He had furnished food for gossip and surmise for many a long evening, when innumerable beverages with surprising names and equally sure results had loosened the tongues of the most reticent.

His appearance, from the first, had been hailed with distrust. "He was one o' them ferriners, with their bullet-heads and white fists. He was a blamed aristocrat, with high and mighty ways and a don't-you-touch-me manner. He was a fop and a blockhead. He didn't know no more 'bout farmin' than the child unborn. He was a sorter fancy fixin'—all show and no sense. He didn't know one end of a plough from another when he fust come out. Sydney said 'twas as sure as fate that the crop 'ud fall off purty near half with that kind of kid-glove management. It weren't to be expected that a 'beg pardon,' 'don't cher know,' almighty Englishman would understand farmin' in a land like this 'un. Why, bless you! they had heard that the whole of Great Britain could be put into the State of Minnesota and not slop over. What kind of a place was that to l'arn to farm in? No; the sooner he got up and dusted out o' thar the better it 'ud be; for who in blazes wanted the country run over and salted down by that kind of a Miss Nancy? Took a bath every mornin', his hired man said, and they all knew that a Saturday

night's plunge in the Kilacoe was good enough for them parts. He needn't come thar puttin' on his airs, because they wouldn't stan' no nonsense."

These and many other equally frank comments were exchanged between the frequenters of the village lounging-room. Although the contempt expressed was superlative, there existed nevertheless a certain amount of latent regret that no actual intercourse with the stranger at Sydney's had as yet been possible. The subject was in a fair way to lose zest among the gossips, or else to die a natural death, unless fed by some new occurrence that would excite their curiosity or fire their wrath.

Fortunately for them, Godfrey was about to do his best to revive their sleeping animosity. As he entered the stuffy room, half-concealed by smoke from many pipes, he was conscious of a lull in the general uproar of voices that had reached him as he pulled up in front of the house. Without looking about him, or offering other greeting than a general nod to the assembly, he made his way across the room, steering between groups of men and a litter of bales and boxes that encumbered the floor. At the farther end, where a short deal counter stood, piled high with an astonishing mixture of groceries, ironmongery, and articles of wearing apparel, some lettered pigeon-holes indicated the space allotted the Government for the distribution of the mail. Standing before this division of the various industries represented, the vis-

itor demanded any letters there might be for Mr. Godfrey Alleyne.

A man left a group of card-players, where he had been watching the game, and occasionally emphasizing his opinion of the play with a varied assortment of expletives, and deliberately strolled behind the counter, as if to deliver into Godfrey's hands whatever mail might be awaiting him.

"Ya-as, they is a letter somewhars 'bout," he said, "directed to the Hon. John Godfrey Alleyne. I guess that's 'bout your size, ain't it?"

"The letter's intended for me," Godfrey replied shortly. "Would you be kind enough to hand it to me? I am in some haste."

"All in good time; don't yer bust yerself while I'm lookin' round fer it," the postmaster replied insolently.

Godfrey endeavored to control his rising temper as he watched the man turn over the different articles upon the counter, look behind tall jars of red-striped candies, shove others aside marked julep and calomel; finally, taking down some coarse raw-hide boots, he searched their capacious depths, turning them upside down one by one, knocking them at the same time violently against the counter.

"'Pears as tho' I rekerlect doin' suthin' with that thar letter," the man remarked coolly, "and yet I can't jest at this minnit put my hand on it."

Godfrey, whose temper had been gradually ris-

ing until it approached high-water mark, found difficulty in keeping from some rather pronounced expression of his impatience. Matters were not improved by a loud guffaw from the audience assembled behind him.

"Can't you find the purty boy a letter from his mammy?" some one asked jeeringly. "Yer oughter not be so careless, Jake, with the Honorable John Godfrey Alleyne's love-letter!" another sarcastically remarked.

The groups in different parts of the room, with the exception of two men who still appeared absorbed in a game of "seven up," played on the end of an inverted barrel, left their several positions, and stood lazily gathered near the counter. The rising wrath of the young Englishman promised some fun, they thought, if Jake did not spoil the sport by laying his hand on the letter. The day had been uncommonly dull, but some slight variation of the monotony now seemed imminent.

The postmaster made one or two futile efforts to find the missing letter, searching the depths of his trousers-pockets, and even feeling carefully round the inside edges of his coarse boots, observing reflectively:

"I've got sech a plaguey lot o' places to hide val'ables in, it's a wonder they ever shows up agen when onct they is put out o' sight." With this reflection he sauntered out from behind the counter, adding, "Ef it comes to light agen I'll save it up for you," and apparently considered the subject

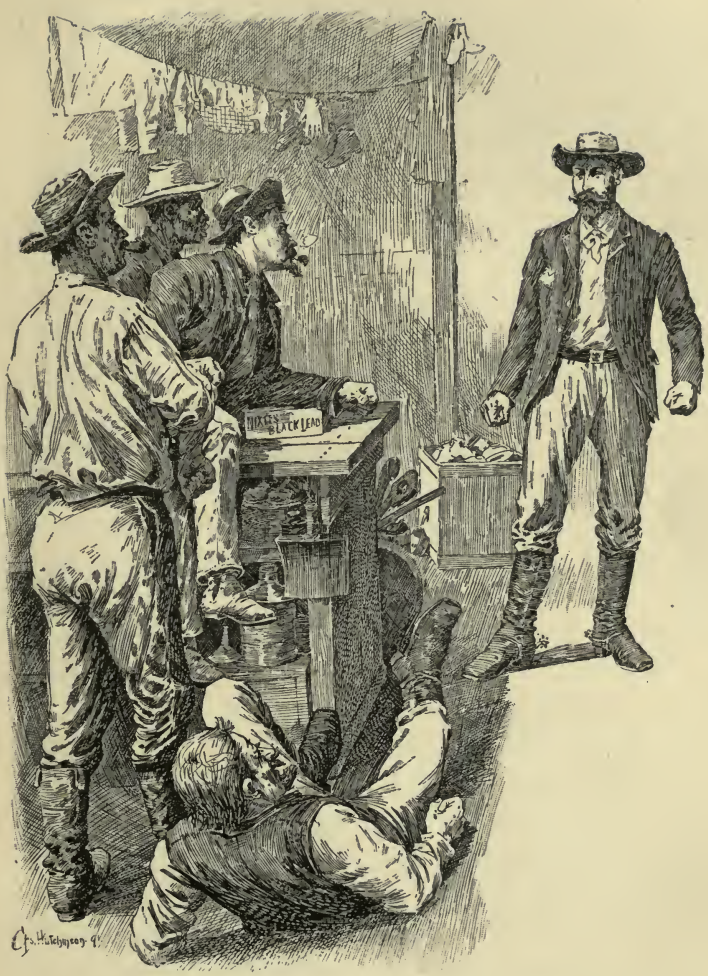
dismissed. Thinking, however, that possibly some slight show of apology might be expected in lieu of the missing letter, he continued casually, "I'll stan' the drinks."

"I don't want your drinks," replied Godfrey hotly; "I've come here to get my letters, and as the postmaster of the Cross Roads I demand of you their immediate delivery."

"You demand, do yer?" mimicked the man, "you white-fisted, girl-faced, d—d Britisher!"

Quicker than thought, Godfrey had turned on the postmaster, and with one well-directed blow had struck him full between the eyes. He fell at full length, apparently lifeless, at the feet of his companions. In a second Godfrey was surrounded, each one of the indolent throng, fired by the sight of their prostrate companion, demanding his peculiar right to avenge the insult dealt the postmaster. Blows fell upon him from every side, and oaths filled the air with brutal violence. Godfrey, with all the skill of a well-trained boxer, parried the force of the blows aimed at him. But he certainly could not long have withstood the furious attack of these angry men had not one of the two who had apparently taken no interest in the altercation, risen from his game of "seven up," and in an authoritative tone, and with a more convincing gesture, exclaimed:

"D—n you! let the man have fair play. What an infernal set of cowards you are to fall on an undefended man tooth and nail! Let up there,



"He fell at full length at the feet of his companions."

or I'll make it hot for the next one of you who lays a hand on him!"

Either the tone or the threat proved convincing; for the crowd parted, while the prostrate postmaster, gradually recovering consciousness, attempted to rise. He partly succeeded, leaning on one elbow, while he searched in his pistol-pocket to find his handkerchief. That useful article, however, lent itself no more readily to discovery than had the missing letter. Not as much so, as was proved; for, pulling a square envelope forth, Jake reflectively read its superscription, apparently attempting to recall from the confused depth of memory where he had heard the name before.

"I sw'ar," he exclaimed, examining the address again, and passing his finger slowly over the motto and coronet with which it was sealed, "I sw'ar ef this ain't the very gol-durned letter that that thar young feller was makin' such a fuss about. You'd better—"

But he was not permitted to finish his instructions. The letter was snatched, more peremptorily than politely, from his grasp by the tall resonant-voiced individual who had demanded fair play for Godfrey; the latter, having shaken himself free, had lost no time in availing himself of his release.

He was already mounting his horse when his defender appeared at the door, holding out the square white missive.

"Here's your letter," he said quietly, and then

to Godfrey's thanks and cordial acknowledgment of his timely interference, remarked: "You had better keep out of this for a while, young 'un, until you understand better how to take a little pleasantry on the part of the boys."

"May I ask your name?" questioned Godfrey. "I should like to know to whom I owe my timely deliverance from the hands of my enemies."

"Paterson," replied the man briefly, without further explanation.

"This is a fortunate encounter, then!" exclaimed Godfrey. "To see you was the main object of my visit to-night to the Cross Roads. Mr. Alistair spoke of you, and thought I might be able to engage your services. I am in need of an overseer on my farm. I don't mind owning," he added, laughing, "that I've a good bit to learn out here and need a competent 'coach.'"

"I don't know about the latter," replied Paterson; "I guess you're modest. It seems as if you were smart enough; but as I am out of a job just now, I don't mind going over for a spell to try my hand. When shall I come?"

"The sooner the better," replied Godfrey, "but you will want first to have an agreement drawn up so that we may start on a good business basis."

Paterson regarded Godfrey as if he were balancing his words with some inward reflection of humorous suggestion. Finally he remarked "that he usually knew his man," and that in this in-

stance he guessed there would be "no occasion for documents."

"I'll be over to-morrow," he added. "Good-night—though it will be morning before you turn in, I am thinking."

With this he returned to his interrupted game, while Godfrey rode on under the shining stars, until one by one they were lost in the break of day.

The next morning Godfrey experienced little or no ill effects from his adventure. He was even amused as he reflected upon his warm reception at the Cross Roads, and with a smile of dismissal consigned the incident to his list of new experiences. The thought of the postmaster, however, reminded him of his letter, lying unopened on the table; he broke the seal and read as follows:

"53 Charles Street, Berkeley Square, W.
June 4th, 188—.

"Dear Godfrey,—It is almost impossible to find time to keep you informed of our life at home, or to tell you how much we continue to miss you. I at least, as your mother, may be excused from dwelling on the fact of your absence, and of my total discontent with your present plan of life. The sooner you consent to leave that wild and dangerous part of the world the better pleased I shall be.

"I do not depreciate your motive in wishing to lead a life of independence, but surely what has been good enough for your ancestors in the past

and for your brothers in the present ought to be good enough for you. They have all got along somehow, as you know, and seemed happy enough.

"I am not now referring to your eldest brother, who certainly has little to complain of in the way of adversity, having now entered upon the full enjoyment of his several estates. He is blessed, moreover, with a wife who is sufficiently attractive, and children that grow more promising day by day. Withal, and not the least to be desired, he possesses a racing stud that is said to be the envy of even the Prince himself—*voilà tout!*

"But it is always well to expect the unexpected, if you will pardon the paradox. Sometimes I fairly tremble for Bertie. Life seems an endless round of pleasure and success with him. He is popular, he is handsome, he is rich, and withal has a sufficient allowance of brains to be looked to for an opinion in the House, and, when expressed, gains the flattery, seldom accorded to a young man, of never speaking to empty benches. But as I was saying before, because he fills, by happy circumstances, the elevated position to which he is entitled by birth, there is no reason for assuming that he is beyond the reach of accident.

"I know what your are saying: 'The mater was always a croaker.' Possibly I am; traits of this kind are constitutional, like fits or inebriety or round shoulders, or any other unfortunate imperfection. But this is what I am coming to, and what I must again urge upon you. Do nothing to

unfit yourself for life at home. Use your experience on the ranch as a summer's holiday. Live among wild Indians or Esquimaux (I am always unfortunately hazy in the knowledge of where the one race leaves off and the other begins), or those other unpleasantly soiled natives whom you so graphically describe; but do not, I beg of you, consider this experiment anything more than a passing fancy, and, above all, do not resign from your regiment.

"The season has been unusually gay. Gwendolen has had enough attention to turn a less well-set little head than her own. She is very dear to me—already almost like a daughter. She is intending to write to you, she says, but asks me to send her love, as she is just now off with the Laughton-Seaburys to Ranelagh.

"I shall send Jackson out to you as you request. Both Margaret and he seem determined, like their master, to try life in the New World. A very proper place for persons of their class. I had forgotten to mention that Bertie is thinking of taking a rather prolonged trip after the Session closes. He seems to wish a more practical knowledge of some of the Colonial questions constantly arising, and proposes sailing some time in August for the Cape or Australia or *quelque part.*

"By the way, you remember young Hope? I met him at her grace's the other day, and he expressed an extraordinary interest in the West, and in that peculiarly uncivilized people you live among.

He even went so far as to say that if he heard of a good opening he would go out and try his fortune. It occurs to me that this might be your opportunity for selling out. At all events, I do not look upon your residence in America as anything more than temporary. I only hope you will escape without any serious physical injury. The exceeding familiarity of the natives with the free use of firearms would make one fear for life as well as limb. Fortunately there is no danger of a more sentimental nature to be apprehended amongst so uncultured a people.

"Keep me informed of your health and interests, and believe me, as ever, to be your affectionate mother,

"ERMYNTRUDE GALBRAITH."

Apparently the letter had not been immediately posted, for enclosed therein was also a thin sheet of paper, written over in a large clear hand, and bearing a subsequent date to the main epistle. In the corner was a coronet, set diagonally, and scrawled beneath, in the stationer's latest agony of invention, the name of Gwendolen.

This letter, like the other, began, "Dear Godfrey," and in a sisterly off-hand way described some of the more recent incidents of the season, now quite at its height. In frank, good, comrade-like words the writer expressed her sorrow at Godfrey's absence; told him without reserve that she had found no one who danced to compare with

him. And as to the river, she positively dreaded the season upon it without him. She expressed the profound hope that "he would soon weary of squaws and wigwams, and return without harm to the haunts of civilization." With the commonplaces of an occasional correspondence where no very deep feeling is stirred, the letter concluded, and was signed in the most approved fashionable disguise, "Gwendolen Alleyne."

Godfrey read the letters through with interest, almost forgetting, for the moment, his own surroundings and the thousands of miles stretching between his present home and that old one which even at this distance seemed the more real. He sat musing for some moments over his mother's letter before returning it to the envelope. At last he exclaimed, "That's like the mater! she never will be content unless she's tempting Destiny. Now what could be better for the family than to have one of us at least take a practical view of our aristocratic pauperism, and make an attempt to ward off a day of reckoning in the Bankruptcy Court! It wouldn't add much to Bertie's felicity to find one of his brothers summoned before that august tribunal. If I've invested my modest all in a few square acres of rich farm-land, that surely can't be a reason for lament? No; until I can show myself something better than a gentlemanly beggar, lounging about expensive clubs and making friends with my tailor lest he should at an awkward moment see fit to present inconvenient

bills, here I shall remain among the somewhat mixed population that my mother so feelingly deprecates.

"As to Gwen—dear Gwen !—she was always the cheeriest of comrades, an awfully good pal. Never making a row if you weren't on hand the minute you had promised to be ; always well turned out, and doing a man credit in the Row. A splendid step really on a good floor. I don't know of a girl who came up to her all last season in the ball-room. And as to her riding : how I should enjoy having her out here for one of her mad gallops ! She would find a new experience in a fifty-mile heat straight ahead without fence or ditch. I must try and describe it to her."

With these pleasant reflections, Godfrey dismissed the subject for the present, and went out to give directions about the care of his horses, and to hold a consultation with Paterson, who had already arrived, concerning the affairs of the farm. This, with a long ride, filled the entire day. But that evening, when resting with his feet stretched out on a chair before him, and his pipe between his lips, some thoughts of the new experiences of the day before crept in and kept him company.

He found himself trying to reconcile an inharmonious setting with the delicate beauty of a portrait that was ever rising before his mind's vision. A girl pushed herself backwards and forwards in a swing under a shadowy tree, while the delicate tints of her fair face changed and varied with every passing thought.

This was a rare flower to blossom on the thorns of an unlovely tree. He could not account for the incongruity. There was a tone of refinement in all that she said, and even in the deprecating, half-uttered thoughts that never found other expression save in the translucent depths of her trusting eyes, that he could not find reason for in her commonplace life and environment. He was continually trying to trace some personal resemblance between Milly's delicate lines and the lank angularity of her father's better-known type. He smiled as he thought of Sandy's unshorn locks and uncut beard ever having suggested the beauty of his daughter's blonde crown. He forgot that time and exposure can do much towards robbing us of any semblance of our youth. He compared the father and daughter feature by feature, seeking in vain a point of similarity. At the eyes he stopped. Although they certainly were not alike in shade or shape, yet each held the same expression of child-like confidence, of unsuspecting trust—almost the same amount of innocent frankness. Yes; in this one regard she was her father's child; but with the persistence of one trying to formulate a reason for something wholly irreconcileable, he summed up Milly's superiority with the trite conclusion that her mother must have been very beautiful.

At all events, the subject served for thought during the consumption of a fair amount of tobacco, and until its soothing influence had suggested that it was bedtime.

CHAPTER IV.

During the following weeks the country for miles around was noisy with the whirr of reapers, and alive with men and boys gathering in the harvest. The season had been a fine one, the farmers reluctantly admitted. There had been no rain of late to hinder the ripening, nor violent storms of hail or wind to lay the crop low. In the early summer an unusual amount of gentle rain had fallen, bringing forward the young shoots and developing the full ears. Even the gossips at the Cross Roads had little to say in condemnation. The season, it was grudgingly owned, had been "oncommon." On some of the farms the crop had already been reaped, and the orderly groups of sheaves which had stood like an army scattered over the plain had been stacked, waiting the threshing-machine.

Sandy had not been as successful as his neighbors in securing help for the extra work, and so, with the exception of a far corner of the farm where he worked daily with the laborers whom he always employed, nothing had been done towards the reaping of the wheat. He had been especially thankful for the excellent promise of the harvest, as he had felt some misgiving as to the wisdom of

depleting his small savings by the extravagant indulgence of his daughter.

"But," he reflected, "she had parted with her schoolmates for good this time, and hadn't much to look forward to in life on the farm. It was dull enough for the young thing out thar alone with him, and 'twasn't mor'n nateral that she should like the little fixin's he could give her."

It was not quite thrifty, perhaps, to draw on his bank account for so heavy a demand, but, with luck, he would make it up after the harvest; at any rate, he was glad he had given Milly these supreme indulgences.

Now he thought of it, the piazza seemed the best investment after all, for she evidently preferred it to any other part of the house. There she sat rocking herself in the cushioned chair almost from morning until night. Presently he remembered he hadn't heard the sound of the piano accompanying her sweet voice for many a long day. He hoped the child wasn't moping. He must get out the accordion, and see if he couldn't inspire his little girl to take more interest in her music. That evening, indeed, the strains of "Lily Dale" were heard falling in long-drawn cadences across the acres of ripened grain. Its harrowing melody seemed to touch the heart of every living thing, for surely the stalks nodded and whispered as the evening breeze stirred them, carrying the sound far out on the plain.

Its melancholy reached Milly down in the grove,

where she sat alone in the swing. She could not have told what it was that brought tears to her eyes—certainly not the laborious rendering of her father's favorite air, for that she had been accustomed to from infancy. And, moreover, since attaining the more critical knowledge of later years, the simple strains had oftener provoked a smile than a tear from her blue eyes. Tears had been frequent with her of late, and that, too, she could not have accounted for. She had been strangely sensitive to every outside influence; a sudden sound or a hurried step would send the blood from her heart in a leap of sudden emotion. What change had come over her life that she should thus sit with strained ear and beating heart? Nothing had happened to vary the monotony of her entire eighteen years, and yet had she not been sufficiently happy in her uneventful life? What was she expecting? For what did she long? she asked herself.

Now and then, during the last weeks, their lives had been stirred by the advent of a stranger.

A few times she had felt the glamour of an existence that before she had experienced only in dreams. Here she touched a life, if ever so remotely, that revealed what the world contained of soul-satisfying charm. For the first time she met with that responsive look and word which interpret sympathy. She could not have analyzed the charm of Godfrey's companionship; all was so new, refreshing, satisfying.

She thought, if her thoughts took form at all in

those days, of how she could nearer approach that standard of attractive womanhood which he unthinkingly revealed had made a part of his past life. In boyish confidence he had spoken of his mother, of his home, of women who had filled that world of enchantment of which he seemed a part. It was beautiful, wonderful, almost like her dream that summer's day! Only then she had thought a prince would come and deliver her from her lonely island in the golden sea, and now, somehow, she felt that she would never be free.

When the strains of "Lily Dale" died in a note of discordant collapse, and the instrument had again been consigned to its case, Sandy went out to find his daughter. He couldn't remember ever to have missed her an entire evening before. Hearing his step, she came quickly from the dim vista of the grove, approaching her father in the shaft of light projected through the open door. Catching sight of her as she came out into the light, he was startled by the strained expression of pain in her white face.

"Milly, child," he said, "what's come over you? What you been doin' to yourself that you look more like a ghost than a right-down healthy piece of flesh and blood. Y'oughter not be sittin' out in the dew like that. I had no idea you was a-swingin' out thar alone by yourself. 'Taint good for you. Now mind my words, you'll have aguey as sure as you're a born child! Come right along in, and let me give you a dose of quinine and

whisky. There ain't nothin' better for slight chill. Why, you're shiverin' this hot night! If 'twa'nt our State, I'd say you'd got it as sure as guns. For the Lor's sake don't go and get aguey of all things! It's just burn and freeze, freeze and burn, till your skin's dried up like pa'chment, and the very teeth in your head drop out for shakin'! That posy complexion of yourn would look more like a dried last year's apple than the heart of a cabbage-rose if once you war took. There ain't no chances wu'th takin' in this 'ere changeable climate."

In his endeavor to impress the risks of neglect upon his child, Sandy forgot to recall the last six weeks of unvarying sunshine by day and of cool refreshing dew by night.

"No, you'd find intermittent 'most as pesky as aguey, I'm bound to say. Nothin' will do for it but quinine and whisky. I 'most lived on it myself them fust few years I was settled in Michigan. 'Twas a close shave between the chills and the quinine which would come out ahead; but constant dosin' did the job, and the chills got wursted."

"Take this," he urged persuasively, presenting a glass to Milly, in which he had dissolved a dose of the omnipotent drug sufficiently powerful to have astonished an eastern practitioner.

"I don't believe I need it," objected Milly, with a wry face.

"Ya-as, you do; swaller it right along as I tell you; 'twon't do to tempt Providence."

"Providence has probable got suthin' better to do than snoopin' to see whether you do or whether you don't take drugs," remarked Hannah in her deepest baritone; "but ef ye're sot on pleasin' Him I should recermend ye to leave out the whisky. I've had my surmise mor'n once that thar wouldn't be such a plaguey sight of aguey in the world ef 'twern't for the trimmin's. Twenty-five years of stiddy diet would do consid'able towards subduin' the nateral beauty of even the most likeliest amongst us. You needn't lay yer skin and teeth at the aguey's door alone, Sandy Alistair," she added severely, as though these physical attributes might have been votive offerings laid upon the altar of the evil goddess whom she named.

"There isn't much danger of my getting to like either the drug or the drink, Hannah," Milly answered; "and as I was born out here, and never have had a day's sickness in my life, I guess I'll manage without much dosing."

"I don't know about yer never bein' sick," grumbled the factotum; "yer had fits as fast as yer had teeth; that I'm likely to know about, for I brung you thro' when Sandy sat howlin' like a madman on the doorstep. For real downright flimsiness and want of the fust glimmer o' common sense, guv me a man in time of sickness. Then they's got about as much backbone as a sarpint. Can't lay their clumsy hands on a blessed thing that anybody wants, and will creep twenty times

all round a room to fetch ye suthin' he hadn't seen for a year, and thought was in the ash-heap. Ask 'em to drop ye a few drops o' suthin' that like as not's deadly p'ison, and their hand shakes and the spoon wobbles till they's poured out enough to put ye in yer coffin. Get 'em to sot up with ye, and they let the fire out in the fust two hours and spend the rest o' the night lettin' the kindlin'-wood drop, and blowin' the smoke out inter the room, or askin' ye where the matches is till yer 'most a mind to get up and put it in yersel'. Then a man can't go without eatin' any mor'n a canary. He wants his meals right along, peck, peck, peck, even ef the doctor's in the house. 'Pears sometimes as though men was all stummick and no grit, or else they is so selfish from Adam down that they can't think of the wimmin-folks fust and theirsels a'terwards. I can't tell how it is, and I guess 'twill never be known, just why the wimmin got the wust o' that thar fust cussin'. 'Cordin' to my idea, that man Adam must ha' been a pesky varmint."

By this time Hannah had rolled up the leg of the stocking she was knitting, and stuck a pin to show the evening's advance in its ribbed length, and without further concession to courtesy stalked out of the room and sought her own small apartment opening off the kitchen. Milly kissed her father, and soon darkness and slumber were the portion of the inmates of Sandy's.

CHAPTER V.

During the busy time of harvesting, Godfrey's visits to his neighbor had of necessity been less frequent. Recognizing the old farmer's sound sense and practical judgment, he had fallen into the habit of consulting Sandy on all points requiring experience. It cannot be denied, however, that the peculiar charm he found in the appealing eyes and sweet face of Sandy's daughter had something to do with the young man's frequent excuses for presenting himself at the farm.

Arriving there late one afternoon in August, after a hot and tiring ride, he experienced a certain pang of disappointment in finding Milly away from home.

"She had druv off in the boghie with Hanner to the store," Jim laconically volunteered as he took Godfrey's horse. The "boss" also was away seeing to the thrashing in the distant fields. Nevertheless Godfrey determined to make himself sufficiently at home to enter and await Sandy's return.

The house seemed to have lost some of its attractive homeliness with the absence of the young mistress; there was altogether a sense of desertion and silence about the place that was oppressive.

The square white-faced clock on the mantel-shelf ticked out the minutes with aggravating deliberation. Flies buzzed and beat themselves upon the windows and ceiling with noisy vehemence. The cat had found some more attractive shelter this sultry afternoon, for she did not appear to keep Godfrey company in the silent house. The air was intensely lifeless, almost insupportable. Godfrey thought he had never felt the atmosphere so stifling. There must be thunder in the air.

Exertion of any kind seemed out of the question. Finally even the flies ceased to beat their wings, and settled in black groups on the white-washed wall. There was something foreboding in the silence of the house. Godfrey got up at last and went outside, standing facing the west. A strange change had taken place. The heavens, which had appeared clear when he entered, had now become suddenly overcast with a translucent mass of gray-green cloud ; from the horizon to the zenith it stretched like an even canopy, save where a line of tawny light divided the earth from the sky. Quickly the heavens grew darker, as layer upon layer was added to the dense mass. Godfrey had never seen so vast an expanse of threatening sky. Some sense of the omnipotence of a storm rolling up and gathering force with every mile it moved over the uninterrupted prairie struck him in the few moments he stood fascinated by the scene. The deepening clouds had rendered the outlook already but a circle of limited area. Over

all lay the strange green darkness shaded with the copper light. Not a leaf stirred; not a sound broke the stillness. No rain fell, nor was there as yet either lightning or thunder to betoken the terrible storm that seemed hovering close upon the earth.

Standing alone, with the darkened sky drawing nearer and nearer, until it seemed to close him round with awful blackness, a sense of his own helplessness in the face of such elemental power filled Godfrey for a moment with strange awe. But even in these few seconds a subtle change crept on.

Far away, where the clouds had now formed themselves into a funnel-shaped mass, there came from out the darkness an ominous sound as of rising wind. A strange weird sigh at first, that seemed to hold all the pent-up woe of Nature's heart. Then deeper, stronger, more desperate, a wail of embodied melancholy; a burst of overwhelming passion, like a demon in distress. On and on, gathering in intensity with every mile traversed; twisting, writhing, circling, but carrying all before it. Great trees bent until their bows lay prostrate on the quivering earth. Branches as big as a man's body were wrenched from huge trunks and carried through the air like feathers. Trees uprooted joined in the mad whirl.

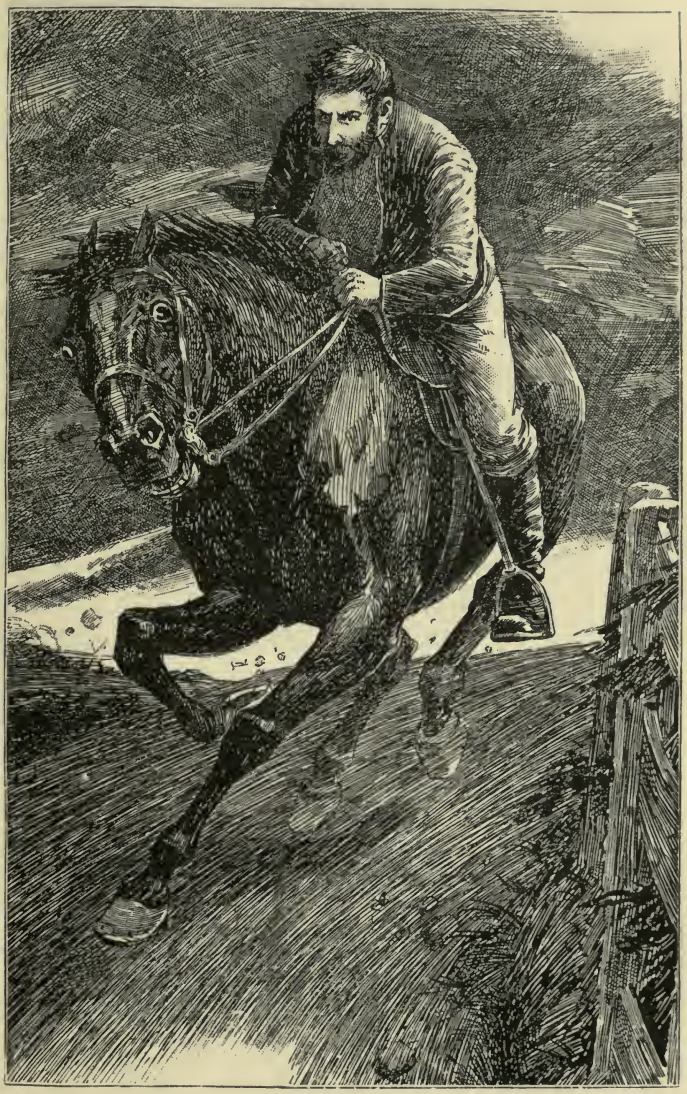
Buildings were seized in the mighty grip of this hurrying monster, twisted and thrown upon the ground like cardboard toys. Cattle ceased their

frightened lowing, struck to right or left or whirled in mid-air. Men clung to whatever was at hand that promised resistance, or better still, if experience taught, flung themselves face downward on the earth.

To Godfrey, who had never witnessed a storm like this, there seemed an awful sublimity in its strength. But in a flash he had realized what must be the helplessness of any one exposed on the open prairie! He thought of Milly, perhaps on her way home, and miles from any shelter. All the tales of disaster he had ever heard related concerning these sudden storms rose in his mind, and beside them he saw the appealing face of Sandy's daughter. What was this mad beating of his heart? Instantly every consideration of personal fear seemed swallowed up in the one potent anxiety. What could he do? how save her? were the flashes rather than intelligent thoughts that passed through his brain. In an instant he had flown through the house with the half-formed resolution of riding somehow somewhere to find and shelter her.

At the same moment hurrying feet rushed past him—men seeking shelter in the barns; while from out the semi-darkness he heard Sandy's voice in tense tones of alarm calling, "Milly! Milly, child! Hasn't she come back? Isn't she home yet? They will be in the track of the storm! My God! what will save her?"

Godfrey flung himself into the saddle as the first



"Godfrey stuck his spurs deep into her sides; she gave a whinny of reproachful protest and plunged forward."

blinding gust struck them. The mare planted her feet firmly before her, and with obstinate instinct refused to stir. Godfrey stuck his spurs deep into her sides; she gave a whinny of reproachful protest, and plunged forward. But who could outride the wind? In blinding gusts and circling eddies of broken trees, splintered clapboards, farm implements, wagons, crops, cattle, even men, the fast-revolving tornado carried all before it. Godfrey, swept along with the rest for a moment, seemed to lose all identity in the hurrying wilderness. Suddenly the horse, struck by some sharp missile, shied, reared, and fell, with Godfrey still in the saddle. He tried to extricate himself, but the weight of the mare held him down. He could see nothing because of the blinding dust and wind-driven chaff which filled the air, but he felt that the worst of the storm had spent itself. He now became aware of a strange tingling sensation in the leg held down by the horse, that seemed to sicken him and stagnate the blood about his heart. He almost lost interest in his position, the result of the storm, the object of his ride—everything. He struggled to remember where he was, and why this numbing weight held him a prisoner. At length he ceased to feel the throbbing life of the still struggling animal; he no longer heard the intermittent rush of the storm, for he had lost consciousness.

Hannah's long opportunity for observation, coupled with a natural sagacity, had taught her to

know and take account of many of the signs of the weather. Rarely was she deceived, and to-day was no exception. Several times had she objected to this trip to the Cross Roads before Milly could persuade her to don her best black alpaca and make ready for the drive.

"It's that trech'rous-lookin' over to'rds the Pines," she had observed, "that thar's no tellin' what'll happen. 'Tain't no day for playin' fast and loose with the weather. Thar's thunder somewhar's about, or I've got no more sense 'n a donkey. In the fust place, the cream's turned, and I never knew it to fail when a storm's brewin'. Then thar's that singin' in my ears agen, jest's tho' a swarm o' bees was usin' my head for a hive. Thar ain't no use goin' agen natur. I've tried it, and I al'ays get come up with. Now mind my words: sure as you insist and start out to-day, jest so sure we're goin' to get caught in suthin' out o' the common. Ef we go, thank the Lord 'tain't none o' my doin'!"

But Milly was not convinced. She took Hannah to the door and pointed out the absolute clearness of the sky. Not a cloud anywhere. One could almost see the outline of the Pine Creek Slope. Milly was very persistent, and when she chose to employ all her coaxing ways upon the old woman, who had been nurse, friend, almost mother, to her since her birth, she usually won the day.

The result had been that Hannah had taken

her revenge in a ceaseless flow of evil prophecies that would have weakened the resolution of a less self-reliant young woman than Milly.

The elder had, however, so far prevailed as to somewhat curtail the length of their shopping expedition. They had started on their homeward journey soon after the midday meal. However the old horse they drove might have been commended for endurance, it certainly never could have won reputation for speed. Hannah, as usual, sat bolt upright in the buggy, with the reins held in her manly grasp, never ceasing to urge the animal to greater speed by repeated jerkings, resounding slaps of the leather on the animal's callous back, and the constant encouragement conveyed in "go-lang" oft repeated.

If there is any pleasure to be found in the fulfilment of evil prognostications where the prophet is also a victim, Hannah certainly was in a fair way to be satisfied. Even Milly at last reluctantly admitted that it looked like a storm.

"Storm!" sniffed her companion; "it's goin' to pour cats and dogs 'fore we reach the next shanty, and I'll be thankful ef 'tain't no wuss. Go-lang!" This last addressed to the raw-boned animal she was urging forward.

The strange light that had settled over the landscape caused Milly to ask if her companion had ever seen anything of the kind before in her Western experience.

"Ya-as, I hev," replied Hannah; "'twere the

same year I was thinkin' o' makin' a blame fule of myself by gettin' married. That storm were a direct interpersition o' Providence," she went on. "'Twere one of them wind-storms, and come up jest as this 'pears to be gatherin' now. It swept clean thro' the country, clearin' up everything that stood in its way, much as a patent rake cleans a hayfield. They wa'n't so much as a barn left to show whar Amos Barton's farm had stood. Providence see fit to take things into His own hand that time. I've never got over givin' thanks for delivery from that thar snar' o' matrimony."

By this time the lowering blackness had settled down over all the land, and the hush of Nature's suspended breath had lent a certain solemnity to their isolation that even the elder woman could not resist. The horse, too, had become restive, picking his way with timorous uncertainty. They were now within Sandy's domain; but except for an occasional shed without sides, where sometimes the farm implements were sheltered, there was not a hope of cover before the farmhouse should be reached. Hannah lashed the frightened beast to greater exertion, while Milly silenlty strained her eyes for any familiar landmark that would show them where they were.

"What is that?" she suddenly asked, grasping the old woman's arm.

"Wind!" ejaculated Hannah shortly.

"It's like the roar of a thousand waters," gasped Milly doubtingly.

"I don't know what it's like, and I don't care; but it's on us sure as taxes. You'd better pray," she added, turning to Milly; "I've got all I ken do to 'tend to the hoss."

But there was scarcely time for Milly's short "God help us!" before the same great storm of engulfing wind surrounded them that had borne Godfrey downwards. They involuntarily crouched low in the bottom of the wagon, feeling it shiver and rise in the arms of the wind. With uncertain movement it settled again on the four wheels, while the horse, with a plunge of fear, carried them forwards a few yards. This had all passed quickly, and when the frightened women raised their heads and looked about them there was slight indication of any personal damage. The covering of the buggy had been wrenched clean from its iron frame, and hung flapping in ribbons of tattered leather about them, but further than that it had sustained no injury.

Hannah was the first to recover herself.

"The cyclone's passed," she said; "we must ha' ketched the outside rim of it only. These little gusts won't do no harm; ef agree'ble, mebby we'd better drive on."

Milly, clinging to the side of the carriage with eyes and mouth choked by the blinding dust, made no attempt to answer, but resumed her place by her companion's side. As she did so a vivid flash of lightning cleft the air, and illumined for a second everything about them. Milly laid her

hands suddenly on the reins, pulling back the horse from tramping on some dark object in the way.

"Look!" she said, "straight before us. A horse is lying across the road! It might be one from the farm. Wait until I see."

She sprang from the wagon, and ran along until she laid her hand on the prostrate body of the horse.

"Why, it's saddled!" she exclaimed; "some one must have been riding from the farm."

An indefinable dread had taken possession of her. She recognized the English saddle, and already knew who the rider must have been. In a second she realized the fact that Godfrey lay helpless under the weight of the fallen brute. By the repeated glare of the lightning she beheld the white senseless face of the unconscious man. With a sharp cry to the woman in the wagon, she flew to the horse's head, thinking by the power of her small hands to drag him forcibly from Godfrey's imprisoned body. The mare, feeling that human aid was near, gave a prolonged agonized neigh, and tried frantically to regain her feet. It was of slight use. But here Hannah's superior physical power was to stand them in good stead. "Urge the horse up agen," she demanded. While Milly obeyed, she, with vigor and adroitness, extricated Godfrey from his helpless position. In a moment Milly was by his side, bending over him. His closed eyes and relaxed muscles seemed to her almost like death.

"'*Look!*' she said, '*straight before us. A horse is lying across the road!*'"

"O! will he ever come to?" she asked desperately: "he's so white and still; and now, look! it's raining on him," she added, as the great drops began to beat upon his upturned face.

"Ya-as, thet is so, and the best thing that could happen, too," rejoined the practical Hannah. "Here, give him a sniff of this camphire," she added, producing a small bottle from the bag she always carried to church, and on expeditions of all kinds that to her mind implied possible risk. Milly lifted Godfrey's head against her arm, holding the bottle to his nostrils. Either that, or the refreshing downpour—for they were all now wet through with the deluge—or the sound of Milly's voice near him, soon restored Godfrey to consciousness. Seeing her face so near reminded him of his last waking thought.

"I've found you," she heard him murmur.

"You hev'n't done nothin' of the sort," answered Hannah promptly; "you hev'n't found nobody, but ef that child hadn't eyes like needles and wasn't as sharp as their pints, you'd a-bin run over clean, or else lyin' out here alone in the rain 'till ye come round o' yersel', whenever that might ha' bin. Now yer'd better bundle inter the buggy along with Milly, and make fer the farm; fer altho' young folks like as not don't dread rhumatiz, I don't care mysel' to be bedrid 'fore my time."

Godfrey had tried to rise, but from pain he could not repress was obliged to cling to Milly's arm.

"Thank you; I should be glad if you could take me in. I think there's something wrong with one of my ankles," he said; "I seem not to be able to bear my weight on it. Would you mind helping me as far as my horse? I must see what can be done for her before we start."

"Thar's no use limpin' all the way to see what's the matter with that thar hoss. I can tell ye right here; she's broke her leg the same as you has, and the sooner you put a shot thro' her the better."

Godfrey was glad to have even this decision made for him. He was suffering terribly. Without a word he handed his pistol to Hannah, and she, taking deliberate aim, placed the ball in the suffering animal's heart. With what care they could they helped Godfrey to the high-seated buggy, Milly getting in beside him. Hannah strode on through the storm. She said that "nothin' on airth" would induce her to run the further risk of rheumatism that driving threatened; the only hope lay in good active exercise. And so in this wise they finally arrived at the farmhouse.

CHAPTER VI.

Not long after this, the Dowager Lady Galbraith, coming down to breakfast one morning, found a letter awaiting her, bearing the familiar American postmark. She broke the seal and read the following:

"Sandy's Ranch, Oct. 6th, 188—.

"My dear Mother,—There has been rather a longer gap than usual in my letters, but I hope you have not been anxious. The fact is, I met with a slight accident about the end of August that made me somewhat seedy, and more than ever disinclined for the fag of writing. I hope you don't mind.

"I got a broken leg in that cyclone, which, I see, reached the dignity of a paragraph in the *Times*. Query: At how many miles an hour must the wind travel before that estimable journal would consider it of sufficient importance to report? I only conclude that the storm in question must have been an uncommon specimen of its kind. At all events, it was a new experience for me, and one I shouldn't regret except that I have been trespassing on the hospitality of a neighbor ever since. Even now I am writing from the shelter of his

home. Happily my own land escaped, as it lies a little south of the general track of the cyclone.

"You are doubtless picturing to yourself a most unhappy victim and impatient patient, for I remember how I always used to make a nuisance of myself if I needed a day's nursing. But I am assured that there is nothing in my behavior to complain of in the way of insubordination, and that I have borne the confinement quite in an exemplary manner. This leads me to say that I have had the best of care. I had Jackson over for the worst of the trouble; and I have received most tender nursing from my host's daughter, Millicent Alistair.

"She is a very angel of goodness, so gentle and refined; not in the least like the farmers' daughters one sees here generally. She has a very lovely face, with clear blue eyes that seem in their innocent appeal to exact the truth they reflect. She has been educated at a boarding-school in one of the large cities near, and is as intelligent and well-informed as any fine lady at home. Moreover, she has a delightful voice that only needs cultivation to render it divine. The best of it all is that she is totally unconscious of her charms, and as natural and unaffected as an innocent child. Pardon my dwelling upon her attractive qualities, dear mother, though I trust you will like what I have said of her, for I hope, before long, to make Millicent my wife.

"I have fully decided to remain here and to throw

in my lot with the citizens of this new world. Here I find a freedom and breadth of life wholly congenial to my tastes and temperament. In this broad land one has no fear of treading on his neighbor's toes, as is the case at home; one's attitude ceases to be that of apology for existing at all.

"There is always room for expansion in many ways, when too close contact does not limit one's point of view. I hope you will look upon my decision favorably. There can be no sufficient reason for my following in the track left by Bertie's chariot wheels. Dear old boy! I wish him long life and every success. The little chappies, too, I hope are doing well.

"I know of what you are thinking—that my decision implies a certain treachery towards the dear girl you say you already consider as a daughter. But listen, and I will show you how far this is from being the case. Following my profession, it would be years before I could expect to offer Gwendolen a home. I am aware that she has a small property of her own, and therefore is not without resources; but to gratify tastes that are inborn and expensive would require an income that jointly we never could possess, unless, indeed, I stick to my life out here.

"Now to ask Gwen to share the vicissitudes of a Western farm would be madness. She could not face its hardships, nor endure the isolation. She possesses nothing greater for me than a sisterly

affection, which would blossom or die as it were fanned by prosperity or the reverse. She is a dear girl, and I am as fond of her as a brother could be, but I love her only as such. I realize this now. We have never been formally engaged. She loses nothing except the pleasure of gratifying you, her near relative, and who will remain her dearest friend. I will write to Gwen, and ask her to love Millicent for the sake of our old-time fellowship; and when I can bring her home to present to you as my wife I trust to your receiving her with the same warmth of affection you have always shown your devoted son,

"GODFREY ALLEYNE."

Lady Galbraith refolded the letter very slowly, and sat lost in thought. The toast grew absolutely cold and her tea unpalatable before she again became aware that she had tasted no breakfast. She acknowledged that all her worst fears with regard to her son's sojourn in that democratic country of his choice had been more than realized. He had not only sacrificed a life of gentlemanly refinement for one of coarse association, but was about to entangle himself in an alliance that would hamper his entire career as well as bring disgrace upon his family. There had been deeds committed during the last six hundred years by members of the same proud line that possibly would not have borne the glare of open day. Lady Galbraith was aware of this; but a marriage with an inferior, a

staining of pure blood with a vulgar admixture, a real downright *mésalliance,* thank God! they had been mercifully spared.

That here in her own family, in an age when even the younger sons of noble families had almost a choice of whom they would marry among gentlewomen of their class, that she should be threatened with a connection so utterly distasteful to her in every particular, seemed incredible in the extreme. Godfrey must be dissuaded from an idea so alien to his birth and training; he must be induced to abandon his life in the West, and to return and dwell in the more desirable haunts of civilized society.

Solitude and isolation had quite turned his brain! She had feared as much since his letters had been filled with these singular rhapsodies concerning the success of his venture. Lady Galbraith struck the closed letter impatiently against the back of her hand.

"Why did I not take alarm before?" she asked herself. "Why did I not feel with unerring intuition that nothing but a woman, a designing, intriguing woman, was at the bottom of his content? Why have I waited to be told that I am expected to receive as a daughter some apple-cheeked, nasal-voiced Western hoyden, who would bring mortification to me and misery upon Godfrey to the end of his days?"

At this point in her reflections Gwendolen entered the breakfast-room, looking more fresh and

attractive than ever in her pale violet morning-dress. Her pretty head, with its chestnut-colored tresses, shone in the morning sun, the charm of perfect health and unclouded youth adding light to her eyes and witchery to her parted red lips. She stooped as usual to kiss her aunt, saying, as she glanced at the letter lying in her open hand, "Ah! a letter from Godfrey. Dear old boy! Any news?"

Lady Galbraith hesitated. There was news, but she preferred to confine herself in its recital to the more incidental parts of the letter.

"Yes," she replied. "I am quite anxious about Godfrey. He has recently met with an accident in one of the extraordinary storms that the Western States of America seem to possess the exclusive secret of producing. How a man could have broken his leg by simply having the wind blow upon him passes my penetration; nevertheless, it is so; and the most vexatious part of the whole affair is that he has been lying, a burden to himself and others, in some sort of a farmhouse, the guest of strangers. It is truly annoying. He seems quite helpless, and does not even speak of returning to his own estate. No good will ever come from this mad democratic fancy of his for making money. The Alleynes have never made money. They have never been in business of any kind, I am happy to say; and why should not Godfrey, if he must do something, remain content with the service or the Church, as his ancestors have done before him?"

"All this sort of thing is so different now, aunty dear," said Gwendolen, helping herself with healthy appetite to a second kidney *à la crème*. "Business isn't looked upon in the same light as in former days. A man rather rises than falls in popular estimation if it is known that he has brains enough to produce as well as consume. There are lots of younger sons, and even men who are the heads of old families, who would be glad enough to have Godfrey's chances. Don't fret over his letter, dear," she said, giving her aunt another kiss. "I have no doubt he is all right by this time. After roughing it a little longer he will return and appreciate us all the more."

She passed out from the breakfast-room into the conservatory lying beyond. Graceful, well formed, exquisitely tinted, she presented an attractive type of beautiful womanhood. Her aunt's eyes followed her lingeringly, lovingly—"almost with a mother's fond pride," as she once had said to Godfrey. Since her childhood, when Gwendolen had been left motherless, she had been her inseparable companion. There had never been a time when the union of her niece with her favorite son had not been the cherished wish of her heart.

Tears rose to her eyes as they followed Gwendolen among the flowers. Was this to be the end of her hopes, her plans, her prayers? Would she live to see the day when, wooed by some stranger, Gwendolen would pass from her home and assume the interests of a different house?

Would she lose this dear girl from the place she filled as a loved daughter, and in her stead find an uncongenial, possibly illiterate, wholly unconventional product of an unknown soil—a farmer's daughter? A girl such as Margaret might have been before her training as a lady's maid, only without the refining traditions of an old family that weave their influence about even the humblest dweller on an ancient estate. Lady Galbraith dashed the tears from her eyes ; the thought was monstrous, impossible ! Something must be done ; but that something must be the result of tact and discretion. She appreciated a certain resemblance to her own temperament in her son's independent nature. She felt that open opposition on her part might prove the very means she dreaded most of precipitating this hateful alliance.

She rose heavily and went up-stairs to her own sunny boudoir. She had need of being alone. For the first time she felt the weight of her advancing years, and withal that reluctance to encounter the unpleasant side of life that increases as experience lessens the vigor of hope. She moved through her room slowly, but at the same time taking note of every minute detail. She laid her hand upon a newspaper lying near, and glanced almost involuntarily at the column of shipping intelligence. Her resolution was formed, but she needed the confirmation of practical detail to bring her intention clearly before her. Ships were leaving almost every day, she saw, by the list. It was

a fearful journey. She shuddered as she thought of all its inconveniences and perils, but she did not falter in her decision.

She must see her son, show him the disadvantages of his position, and win him from all thought of this marriage so beneath him. If it were necessary she must even encounter this siren of his infatuation, and exact from her a repeal of whatever unfortunate understanding might already exist between them.

There must be some sense of honor even among the uncultured inhabitants of that rough country. Even a savage Indian, she thought, would not fail to feel the force of her argument could she but appeal in person to his latent generosity. She called her maid, and announced her intention of sailing by the first Cunard steamer leaving Liverpool. There was no time to be lost.

By tea-time that evening Lady Galbraith's arrangements were practically completed. As she sat with Gwendolen over the bright fire in the half-light of gathering twilight, she decided that this was a fitting time to confide her plan to her niece.

"O, aunty!"—Gwendolen's voice held every tone of amaze and incredulity—"what an undertaking, and for you alone! Couldn't you give it up? Godfrey can't really be very ill, you know, with only one leg broken. It's not a thing to be anxious about, although, of course, an awful fag for him, poor boy! Think of the sea at this time

of year, with the pitching and tossing and the sickness: ugh! I wonder how you can contemplate such a voyage! Cold chills run down my back with the very thought; and besides, dear, haven't you always said that nothing would induce you to cross the ocean, and that America was of all places the least worth visiting, and that Americans were forward and bold, and spoke a tongue you could scarcely understand, and that the great American beauties who have married so well over here were no prettier than we English girls, and that you even do not approve of international marriages?"

"No, I do not, most decidedly. I do not approve of our young men's discontent with the life to which they are born. It is all a part of this leveling democratic spirit of the age. It creeps into the upper strata of society, and undermines inherited tastes as surely as it lays a hand on the lower orders and engenders discontent with whatever station in life it has pleased Providence to place them in. It was not so in my younger days," resorting to the infallible argument of middle age. "Then, if a young man were born to fortune, or by happy chance loved some one in his own rank who endowed him with one, he married and, as a rule, lived happy ever afterwards, as the fairy-tales say. But if the family inheritance was limited, and but small portions fell to the younger sons, they submitted without all this talk of bettering their fortunes, making money, taking care of themselves, and all the discontented phrases

born of our advanced age. No; there is nothing I deprecate so much in Godfrey as this very spirit of equality and the lauding of what he is pleased to term Republican principles. Bah! it is quite maddening. No one can tell where it will end."

Gwendolen, excited by the prospect of what this change suggested, returned to the practical. Might she not accompany her aunt? Would it not be best for her to share the perils of such a voyage and the subsequent hardships?

Lady Galbraith returned a reluctant denial.

This was not a part of her project. She had decided to surprise Godfrey with her presence, giving him no time to prepare a fortress of argument. She wished, by the sudden contrast of her own personality, to show him the utter want of refinement in the persons he had turned to in his loneliness and suffering. She must in no way prepare him for her visit, lest he should foresee the object of it and meet her forearmed; neither must she weaken the effect of this *coup* she was preparing by pressing upon him at once the desirability of a marriage with Gwendolen.

Lady Galbraith's knowledge concerning the physical features of that part of the earth's surface she now proposed to visit may have been somewhat indefinite, but her reading of human nature told her that there as well as here one must trust sometimes to manœuvring, even strategy perchance, to accomplish a victory. She would face the terrors of a voyage at an inclement season alone with

her maid; she would undertake a long journey among strangers in a land of which she had but the vaguest knowledge; she would expose herself to a life that included for her all the elements of discomfort; she would run the risk of receiving but a reluctant welcome by an inopportune appearance if she could but save her son from this threatened fatal mistake, if she could but convince him of the absolute enormity of this disloyalty to his name.

She smoothed the delicate lace of her cap with her long patrician fingers, but there was decision in each separate touch with which she adjusted its soft folds. "No, my dear," she replied at length; "I shall go alone. It is not advisable to expose any one but myself to the horrors of that wild country. It is to be hoped that there will be no encounters with the natives on the way thither. I have heard, my dear, that they rush upon railway-trains with loaded revolvers and demand of the passengers their money or their lives; that they make no exception in favor of ladies, but actually take their jewels and their watches. O, it is too shocking! I shall carry mine in a belt under my stays, my dear, and at least have the satisfaction of selling my life dearly."

As Gwendolen could not but picture the inconvenience of having one's watch so securely concealed, she ventured to hope that the desperadoes would overlook her aunt's, even if worn in the customary way. But Lady Galbraith had determined to enrich as slightly as possible any band

of the desperate kind she described, and finally decided to leave all but the most necessary articles of apparel at home.

She then explained that she had made arrangements for Gwendolen to spend the time of her absence with the younger Lady Galbraith, adding that Lilian would then have her solitude enlivened during the absence of her husband on his prolonged tour. She also developed a plan she had in embryo, which was that if Herbert decided to make the entire circuit of the globe, as he had some intention of doing, why should not Gwendolen accompany Lilian as far as New York to meet him? They all could then return happily home together.

After this the days were busy with final arrangements and instructions. The time flew past until one day early in November, when Gwendolen, with Percy, one of Lady Galbraith's younger sons, waved a final adieu to the tearful woman standing on the upper deck of a westward-bound steamer. As the familiar faces of them both grew dim in the fast increasing distance, Lady Galbraith questioned herself as to the wisdom of this proposed adventure in the New World.

CHAPTER VII.

This has been an open winter in Minnesota. Very little snow had fallen by the middle of December, although there had been continuous rain. The roads were almost impassable by reason of the mud. Every one was longing for a hard frost; every one was prophesying all kinds of ills if winter weather did not set in soon. A stop had been put to most of the sport and some of the more practical occupations of the season. There was little or no hunting; shooting was impossible without the strong crust of the snow to bear up the sleighs. Wood could not be stored; ice did not form on the lakes that furnished the supply for the hot summer. There could be no sleighing parties, no "donations," no gatherings of any social nature in the neighborhood, as each family found itself practically house-bound by the soft impassable roads. It was a time of tiresome inaction. Godfrey found the time dragging more heavily than ever before.

He had managed to reach Sandy's farm but few times since his return to his own domain. His accident had rendered the long and now wearisome ride no easy undertaking. The irritability

consequent upon enforced idleness was beginning to tell upon him in many ways.

His limited stock of books had given out, so that he was reduced to the repeated re-reading of most of those he possessed. Newspapers, when he was able to obtain them from the Cross Roads, were so old as to appear in the light of ancient history. To crown all, he seemed forgotten by his friends in England. He received no letters from them, and this seemed the stranger as his last communication to his mother was of a nature, he thought, to call forth a reply. He had not, he confessed, felt confident of her immediate cordial assent to his proposed marriage with Millicent; but he certainly had expected an acknowledgment of the announcement.

He understood his mother's conservative views too well to expect from her a glad welcome to this daughter of a distant and unknown land, and of a people whom she willingly misunderstood. Godfrey did not realize all that his mother's prejudice might imply, nor had he but a faint idea of the strength of that inborn pride that would dare all things to save him from what she deemed a misalliance. At all events, six weeks had elapsed since his letter was posted to her, and as yet no answer had been received.

It was, too, more than a fortnight since he had seen Milly. His last journey to Sandy's had been fraught with so many unmistakable signs of suffering that she, with quick intuition, perceived the

danger he incurred of retarding his ultimate recovery. In parting she had exacted a promise from him of absolute rest from the saddle as the best prescription that love could dictate. Godfrey had yielded to her wish, but chafed under the confinement; still more than that he could not escape unwelcome idleness. Whatever diversion he could find in work about the house or premises he eagerly embraced. He wrote to Milly that he had become an accomplished blacksmith, and could now shoe a horse with as much skill as any smith. He invented various improvements for the house, and occupied himself with all manner of amateur trades. He set up his camera, and photographed everything within range of its lens. He developed plates and made sketches and otherwise allowed his fancy full play in his endeavor to kill time. But, in spite of all, the days passed slowly.

One evening he sat alone in his large square sitting-room, which presented an odd medley of bachelor resources. He was idly sketching innumerable portraits of Milly in different phases and attitudes that recurred to his memory.

A bright laughing face looked out from under a flower-decked hat; a half-turned shy young damsel cast down her sweet eyes lest they should betray the story written therein; a profile with full childish outline and piquant arched brows reminded him of that day in June when he had first seen her lovely face; anxious eyes were raised as she stood, with hands in his, imploring him by his

"He stopped with his pencil suspended, listening to the unusual sound of horses on the road."

love for her to ride away, and not return until she could welcome him perfectly restored. Godfrey smiled as he sketched: these portraits brought her so vividly before him. It was, in truth, his nightly occupation. As his fingers held the pencil he could recall even the sound of her voice, the now familiar accent with which she emphasized and seemed to give new meaning to the few words she spoke. Godfrey loved to dwell upon each remembered image. There was a suggestion of her simple beauty and unaffected charm in the outlined drawings, unskilful though they were.

To-night he had gone so far in this pictorial retrospect as to depict Milly in every scene he could recall, when the pleasant communing met with an unexpected interruption. He stopped with his pencil suspended, listening to the unusual sound of horses on the road. Soon the labored approach of wagon-wheels was distinctly audible in the silent night. Godfrey hastened out into the covered porch to welcome his unexpected visitor. It was not often one arrived who came in the dignity of carriage and pair.

The wagon was a light covered affair, with straight glazed curtains that could be let down and buttoned closely at the sides, protecting and hiding from view whoever occupied the back seat. The driver sat in front, unconcealed by the curtains, and in him Godfrey recognized the youth who had driven him from the distant railway-station some months previously. Coming out from

the open doorway as the wagon drew up, he heard a voice strangely familiar but for the moment unrecognized, asking:

"Have we arrived at last, I wonder? For heaven's sake, young man, let me out of this strangely constructed carriage! It closely resembles a bread-tray on wheels for comfort, while its black enclosed sides make one think of one's last journey."

Godfrey thought he must be dreaming. How could his mother's voice reach him from out that curtained vehicle? "My dear mother!" he began, busying himself with confused fingers in unfastening the buttoned curtains, scarcely knowing whether he expected to see his mother revealed behind them, or awake and find that he had been dreaming.

"Yes, dear Godfrey; at great personal risk and much inconvenience I have ventured on this perilous journey. Ah! my dear boy, my dear son," she exclaimed, when, having at last been helped to her feet, she stood in the porch with Godfrey's arm around her. "It is nothing now that I see you, now that I am here! A mother would encounter many dangers for such a moment! But, my dear Godfrey, do you think the peculiar methods of posting in this country quite safe? I assure you that more than once I entirely despaired of our lives. On one occasion the traces quite gave way, that rather forward young man informed me, and we were nearly precipitated into the bog

through which we have been continuously travelling since we left the railway. Once we were stuck for some hours in its depth, and unable to extricate our horses or the vehicle ; except for the timely arrival of some curiously equipped horseman, we might even now be sitting there awaiting assistance."

Godfrey had led his mother in before the comfortable fire, and with Margaret's aid was disrobing her of some of the many wraps with which she was completely enveloped. She evidently had prepared herself to resist any encroachment of arctic temperature she might encounter on the way.

Finally the last tippet was unfastened and the last shawl unwound. Godfrey stooped and kissed his mother affectionately. "Welcome to my Western home, dear mother ! Who could have thought of your venturing so far to visit me? a well-planned surprise indeed !" But some instinct of hospitality told him that the pleasure of her arrival would not be enhanced by any reference to his present interests. Hastily gathering up the little sketches with which his table was strewn, he thrust them out of sight in a convenient drawer.

The monotony which had proved so depressing had at last received a signal variation, but the complications arising by reason of his mother's actual presence in the house were not without serious drawbacks, Godfrey was obliged to own. An establishment comfortable enough for a bachelor living alone certainly did not answer the require-

ments of a woman accustomed to all the comforts and elegancies of a well-appointed English home.

Lady Galbraith made no complaint of the inconveniences. She knew that to accomplish the object of her visit she must remain. A pleasant acquiescence in all that she encountered would alone prevent her son from carrying her off to some city further east, where she might enjoy the luxuries to which she had been accustomed. But this would not answer her purpose. She wished to surround Godfrey with the influence of old associations, to carry his mind back to the pleasures and attraction of his former home; to dwell upon the ease of taking up the old life again which waited his return, so to speak, with open arms; to show by contrast the barrenness, the discomfort, the uncongenial atmosphere of his present existence. Then she would appeal to him to throw off this entangling *liaison* he had been betrayed into, and to abandon for ever all idea of throwing in his fortunes with this land of unpleasant experiences.

There was a last resource to which she might be driven, but for her own sake she hoped to be spared so thankless a task. Were it necessary, however, she should appeal to this girl herself, and ask the release of her son's word had the unfortunate affair reached the point of actual betrothal. She hoped this would not be a part of her self-imposed duty; she became quite nervous thinking about it.

The Christmas season was approaching. Lady

Galbraith had in some degree become accustomed to the many drawbacks of her son's new home; at first she found it difficult to resign herself to the many daily denials. The idea of sending but once a week to procure one's letters seemed to her a depth of barbarism only experienced by the inhabitants of Central Africa. To have no chemist conveniently near to answer all sorts of imaginary requirements; to find no doctor within a radius of twenty miles; to be robbed of the privileges of the Church, and the diversion of social intercourse, were all to Lady Galbraith real and vital deprivations. Yet she dwelt but little on any of these subjects, unless it were to indicate how thoroughly Godfrey, as well as she, would enjoy his return to civilization again.

One day, after some reflections of this kind, Godfrey answered pleasantly: "That is all very well for you, dear mother, who may return at will to the enjoyment of all you have left behind, but you know I have no such prospect. My lot is cast in quite a different world, and I must conform to its requirements. I do not look upon my life here as one of hardship, though it certainly includes a fair amount of sacrifice. There is much to be accomplished, much to be enjoyed, and I have no thought of giving it up."

Lady Galbraith's lips tightened a little, but she said pleasantly: "That is quite a natural feeling. Youth is full of hope, and looks forward to conquering happiness, not courting it. Your experi-

ence does not differ probably from that of other young men, only all have not so much to lose by marring their lives as you have to gain by accepting it at the best. You naturally wish to try your wings a little away from the old nest, and you have, I own, shown wonderful self-reliance, and met with encouraging success. You seem already to grasp the principles of this new business, and to command a respect from the men you have about you that is certainly gratifying. But this same energy employed elsewhere would meet with an equal reward. It is not necessary to be buried to show that one is still alive. No; I naturally look to my sons to remember their birth and social standing, as well as to gratify their mere personal ambitions; to this end they must live the lives their fathers have before them, and marry in the rank to which they are born."

Godfrey winced. This was the first time that his mother had referred even by implication to the subject of his marriage; he felt instinctively what would be the task before him of reconciling her to his determination. He scarcely liked to inflict the pain he knew his words would convey, yet disloyalty to Milly would be implied in his silence.

"Surely a man is the best judge of what would constitute a happy marriage for himself," he began; "the choice cannot be made by another, or taken out of his own hands. Love is not a bidden guest, however welcome. You surely would not

deny your son the right to marry the woman he loves."

"There are many phases of love, and what appears as such often is but the result of circumstance, propinquity, the want of other choice, or the result of gratitude; there is no sentiment which compares with it for mistaken identity, but none of these conditions claim the essential trait which should govern the choice of a wife—suitability."

"You will permit me to speak directly of this subject as it concerns Milly and myself," said Godfrey, coming to the point. "I do not recognize any analysis that would define my feelings towards her, nor do I seek to reduce them to words; all I know is that she is in herself adorable, that I love her, and that I hope to make her my wife. I shall not attempt to define her attractions; one might as well try to add beauty to a drifting rose-tinted cloud by attempting to imprison it upon canvas! Milly is what she is, pure like snow which has never been sullied, natural like the flowers we gather in cool dells, and can scarcely name for their rarity. Even you, when you see her, mother, will be won by her charm and receive her as a daughter for my sake."

"Never!" The one word was uttered between compressed lips. "Welcome a girl as a daughter whose father works like his own hired servants, and is as ignorant and uncultivated as one of them! Take to my heart as my son's wife this girl, whose ideas of refined existence have been

gathered in the unfinished, crude, money-getting cities through which I passed on my way hither! A girl with a peach-blossom complexion that has won your fancy, doubtless, where the general tint of the feminine skin seems to hold a notable admixture of saffron! A girl who by contrast with her kind in this out-of-the-way corner of the earth appears indeed like a rare flower. But transplant her, place her amid the beautiful exotics of our own sphere—take her home and introduce her as your wife to the society of which you are a member—would not your flower of the prairie grow dull in tint, coarse in texture, and lose all that charm of delicacy and attraction you now so poetically ascribe to her? It cannot be possible that a son of mine would persist in a union so foreign to his nature, so opposed to all family traditions, so obnoxious to his mother, and so degrading to himself!"

Lady Galbraith had not intended this peroration, but, led by the exigency of her son's position, she forgot her usual calm dignity. She felt as a mother might who sees her child courting danger and snatches him against his will from harm.

Godfrey feared the result of further argument at the moment, and wisely refrained from dwelling at greater length on Millicent's qualities or charms. He must wait a little longer for some happy accident to throw them together, and to win his mother in spite of all prejudice to a juster view of their relations. The thought of abandoning Milly

or following his mother back to that life of ease she described never for a moment occurred to him. For a better understanding of his aims he knew he must wait; for a juster estimate of his ambitions he was willing to trust the future; and the subject of his marriage, the thought of all others nearest to his heart, he felt must be left for the present, in the hope that chance would befriend him in winning his mother to an approval of his choice.

Accident did shortly bring about what he had found difficulty in planning.

CHAPTER VIII.

At length the snow fell. They awoke one morning at Sydney's to find the world transformed. In every direction, as far as the eye could reach, a dazzling whiteness shone. The few trees about the house stood silently drooping with their weight of snow; but for the most part the landscape stretched away in unbroken level purity. The short stubble of the fields scarcely penetrated the soft covering, for the snowfall had been heavy and without drifts. The barns and outhouses had received a thick white thatch that changed their unadorned ugliness into an architecture that no man can fashion.

The exquisite glory of this white world drew from Lady Galbraith her first words of enthusiasm concerning anything formed of God or man which she had seen since her arrival. She stood for a time at the window lost in contemplation of the transformation; presently she gave utterance to the wish which for some time had hovered on her lips. Part of the policy of her visit was an absolute reticence in regard to objects which surrounded her; she never permitted herself any positive admiration for anything outside her old-

world life. Even now she considered a negative commendation sufficient.

"Who could believe this was the same stretch of gray ugliness we looked out upon last night?" she said. "It is almost beautiful, this endless waste of snow! One could imagine, if one's mind were capable of isolation, that there was nothing in all the universe but a snow-clad earth and a shining blue sky. It is beautiful! I almost wish I were out trying with swift horses to find how far the white cloak reaches."

Godfrey's eyes shone, though his voice did not betray his anxious hope.

"There's nothing easier, mater dear," he answered. "Come with me in my cutter to the Cross Roads; there is going to be a Christmas service in the school-room this evening, and afterwards the families from all the neighborhood will gather for an hour's chat, and probably a little music or other diversion. It is called the minister's donation—something quite new in your experience, and I dare say you will be interested in a scene so novel."

Lady Galbraith did not respond to the last part of Godfrey's invitation, but she answered pleasantly that she should at least enjoy the sleigh ride, and that a service of the Church, even in a school-room, would make one feel a little less of a heathen than she had of late.

The rest of the day was spent by Godfrey in impatient anticipation, for he expected to find

Milly and her father assembled with their neighbors to join in the annual donation-party. The simple plan adopted by the scattered families who dwelt within a driving radius was to meet at the Cross Roads on Christmas Eve, bringing with them whatever gifts they could spare for the support of their young clergyman, the Rev. George Boynton.

The assortment of gifts thus collected was sometimes astonishing, but the motive of the donors sincere. These hard-working farmers were not often well off in money, but whatever produce could be spared or exchanged for what would best please "the parson," as he was called, was given without grudging. The men as a rule did not often appear in church, some of them only on this anniversary occasion; but they acknowledged with one consent that the community could not exist respectably without a clergyman. And moreover, "as most wimmen-folks took to religion nateral," they must provide a means for observing its outward forms.

The present occasion was as new to Godfrey as to his mother, excepting that he had heard the donation dwelt upon by his neighbors as the best-anticipated event of the year. He determined that this time it should be notable in several ways.

The sun had already set, though the red afterglow lingered in the west, dyeing the earth with its blood-red tint, when Godfrey, having tucked

his mother into the narrow cutter made warm with furs, gathered up the reins and started on their rapid drive. The air was keen and exhilarating: muffled in furs and warm with foot-stoves, they only felt the tonic of the air as they dashed on over the track already prepared for them.

They found other sleighs of every variety and construction filled with families of various sizes and ages, all converging towards the main road that led to the village. The church was in no wise suggestive of its ecclesiastical use, being no other than the village school-room fitted up to answer as near as possible the requirements of the service.

Desks had been pushed to one side, and in double rows chairs were ranged through the centre of the room. On a raised platform at the end stood an improvised reading-desk, and beside it a harmonium. The room was already nearly full when Godfrey and his mother arrived, and the service about to begin. They found two vacant chairs about midway up the aisle, wherein they seated themselves and awaited the first words of the clergyman. He stood in his white surplice beside the desk, with a small hymn-book open in his hand. His countenance was attractive, holding that look of undaunted youth and unselfish concentration that can render even ascetic features beautiful. His was a clean-shaven face, with clear-cut thin features. His dark hair, parted in the centre, was tossed back in careless waves, which

softened the severity of his brow and deep-set dark eyes. He waited for a moment in silence while the late-comers settled themselves in their places, and then in clear resonant tones gave out the first lines of the hymn that was to open the services. As he read the familiar lines,

> Come hither, ye faithful,
> Triumphantly sing !

a young girl left her place in the front row of worshippers and seated herself before the open instrument on the platform. She was dressed in gray of some soft warm material, and over the shining wealth of her blonde hair was fitted a close sealskin toque. Her eyes shone with the unusual excitement of leading the singing, but their long dark lashes veiled them modestly. Godfrey's heart gave a bound. Milly had never looked so lovely, he thought, and now his mother would feel the charm of her winning face and gentle manner, while all her prejudice would vanish. Who could resist Milly ?

She played the first bars of the ancient tune, and then began with her fresh girlish voice the glad words of the Christmas hymn,

> Come hither, ye faithful,
> Triumphantly sing !

The clergyman came and stood near, supporting her clear soprano with his full well-trained baritone. The voices blended, and led in full cadence the untutored rise and fall of the congregation's

singing. Lady Galbraith found herself joining with the rest, and Godfrey felt he had never before understood the tone of gladness in the words he sung. When the last full notes died away Lady Galbraith leaned towards her son, and whispered with some curiosity,

"What a lovely voice! Who is she?"

Godfrey answered proudly, "Millicent."

Lady Galbraith's voice was not raised again during the remaining hymns, but she could not altogether refrain from mingling in the service, that carried her back to other scenes and cherished associations.

The short ritual concluded, the congregation rose and awkwardly separated into groups of varying numbers. They conversed for the most part on the weather, and other like topics of absorbing mutual interest. The Rev. George Boynton had soon doffed his robes, and was eagerly making his way from group to group, endeavoring with fitting words to place his curiously assorted guests at their ease. There was a courtesy in his acknowledgment of the various gifts bestowed that was little short of Chesterfieldian. From the sack of flour deposited in the corner of the school-room by Joshua Briggs to the most hectic of antimacassars embroidered by Miss Melissa Meggs; from the keg of molasses bought by Jerry Walker in exchange for several bags of oats, to the highly decorated slippers that the younger ladies in his congregation supplied with abounding liberality: each and all

met with a pleasant acknowledgment, and the few well-chosen words that convey more than simple gratitude.

Lady Galbraith, left alone to watch the scene, found herself filled with wonder. It did not reproduce any that she remembered in all her long experience. There was nothing in her memory of school teas or penny readings that suggested even a faint resemblance to what she now witnessed. On those occasions she had received the homage due to her rank as the most exalted as well as bountiful lady in the parish. But here she was ignored, except for occasional glances of curiosity bestowed by the women upon her dress. She began to weary of her unimportant position and to wonder where Godfrey could be, and why the young clergyman had not begged the honor of an introduction, when she was accosted somewhat abruptly by a mild-eyed, gray-haired old man standing beside her.

"Take a cha'r," he said; "you look purty well tuckered out, and no wonder! you ain't no light weight, I'll be bound, to stan' holdin' yourself up all thro' the perceedin's; 'tain't at an end yet," he continued proudly, as though the resources of the community had been questioned by the proud-faced woman he was addressing. "As I was a-sayin' to Milly—" he began. Lady Galbraith's expression changed from good-humored tolerance to one of haughty reserve. Shades of this sort, however, were lost upon her companion — "as I

was a-sayin', no one would believe what the Cross Roads can perduce by way of musical talent and the like till they visits the donation sociable and sees for themselves. Now I haven't noticed you here amongst us as a reg'lar thing," he questioned adroitly, regarding his listener, "and I don't jest at this minnit recall your name?"

Lady Galbraith did not avail herself of the opportunity given, but replied merely, "I am a stranger here."

"Do tell," resumed Sandy with pointed interest; "I might ha' known as much. They is, now I come to look, a kinder ferrin air about you—a sort of pick-up-my-skirts expression that we down-right Amur'cans can tell is ferrin the minnit we claps eyes on one o' you. I don't mind tellin' you now we're talkin' together, out of hearin' and sorter confidential like, that that young fellar over thar next the wall makin' up to my daughter had them stand-offish manners when he fust come amongst us. But sakes alive! he ain't like that now no more'n nuthin' in the world. When him and Milly began to keep company—" (Lady Galbraith shuddered.) "Is thar anything the matter with you?" Sandy asked sympathetically; "you do look tuckered out clean, I do declar'! 'Tain't no use tryin' to stan', even braced up against the wall, when any one gits as heavy as you be. Lemme git you a cup of coffee, or suthin' revivin'?" he asked kindly. "I can vouch for the coffee—a No. 1 XX. Hanner browned, ground, and made it

herself; but, like as not, I could get a drop of whisky for you, if you'd ruther."

"No, thank you," Lady Galbraith answered faintly; "I feel quite well, I require nothing."

"Waal, that's right. No use in stimulants unless they's needed; but as I was a-sayin', it's all manner: they isn't a more gentlemanly, modester-mannered, better-disposed young man in the whole community than Godfrey Alleyne, if I do say it as hadn't ought. Thar 'tis agen! I thought you said suthin'. Must be the buzzin' in the room makes them sounds in my ear. Waal, as I was a-sayin', when he come to ask for Milly, I jest said, 'Thar ain't a young fellar nowhars about I'd sooner see her married to. You've got soft ways and gentle, and I do feel kinder tender o' Milly. She's my only child, and, havin' lost her mother when she was a baby, she and me have kept kinder close together.' I don't mind sayin' I set a awful store by her. I ain't claimin' I al'ays done my duty by her, nuther. She ain't no wife for a farmer, no more'n a baby. Hanner's done it all, and she a'most as much of a ninny about Milly as I be: won't let her clean up or scrub or make the bread, or nuthin'. Hanner's not very smooth on the outside, but she's got a heart 'most as soft as velvet."

Lady Galbraith sighed audibly; the details of this family were growing irksome. Why should she listen patiently to this illiterate, uncouth farmer, who seemed to possess neither discretion nor discernment? Would she be obliged to tell him that

reminiscences of his daughter were of no earthly interest to her, and his patronage of her son wholly distasteful? She must break away from these enforced confidences somehow. She could no longer breathe in the detestable proximity of Milly's father. The position was unbearable. She must either make herself known to him, and by the simple statement shatter the possibility of the alliance he referred to with such complacency, or she must escape from the room before she had given utterance to words perhaps better left unsaid. An interruption occurred, however, which took Sandy from her side without more than a muttered "Milly's goin' to sing," by way of excuse.

Again the young girl stood by the side of the harmonium, where Mr. Boynton had now seated himself to accompany her.

She had laid aside the sealskin cap she had previously worn, and, with the mass of her soft blonde hair curling low on her brow, looked even younger than her years. Lady Galbraith began gathering up her furs, preparing to move away, but when the full notes of Milly's voice thrilled through the room she could not but remain a listener.

Handel's grand "Angels ever bright and fair" had possibly never held spellbound a more curious or diverse assembly since first it touched men's hearts. Lady Galbraith had heard it in many places, sung by queens who ruled the world by the music of their voices, but she had never realized its beauty as she did now. The girl's unclouded

brow, her soaring young voice, seemed to raise her to the level of the realm of which she sang. At first she had not dared to meet the upturned faces, but, becoming rapt in the repeated cadences, she lost sight of all, and saw only her lover standing in the throng. The old man just below the harmonium, with his head half turned to where his daughter stood; Godfrey erect, towering above the people about him, with clear, fearless eyes beholding only the one to whom his heart turned: all made a picture of which only Lady Galbraith felt the power. Milly's listeners, if the truth were told, were, for the most part, greatly relieved when the song ended. Their pride in her did not prevent the expressed wish that she would sing something with which they were more familiar, "Old Kentucky Home" or "Rock me to sleep, mother," and "not them stuck-up things she l'arned at boardin'-school."

The group separated again, and Lady Galbraith found herself close to her son and Milly, who had stepped down from the low platform. Godfrey saw that he had at last the opportunity for which he longed; taking Milly's hand in his own, he led her forward a few steps to where his mother stood.

"This is Millicent Alistair, dear mother; you know her by name already: I hope you will be friends." The healthy even color had forsaken his face for a moment, but his eyes had grown darker and more earnest.

Milly looked up shyly with a deprecating little smile hovering about her lips, and in frank unaffectedness held out her hand to greet Godfrey's mother. The elder woman looked at her coldly, and, without responding to Milly's gesture, acknowledged with a formal salutation her son's introduction.

"Good-evening, Miss Alistair," sounded to Milly like words from an unknown tongue when uttered in this frigid tone by Godfrey's mother. But her sense of hospitality, coupled with her desire to please, conquered her shyness: she made a timid attempt to engage Lady Galbraith in conversation.

"I hope you have enjoyed the sociable," she began. "It's about the only time the settlement all gets together, and Mr. Boynton says—Mr. Boynton is our minister, you know—there can't be any real life in the Church unless we're all willing to pull together. He ought to know, I suppose. He's a very gifted man; indeed, too good for the Cross Roads, we often tell him. I can't for my part see why souls are more valuable in Minnesota than they were in Boston. His preaching certainly went further there, for there must be more chances in a big church than out here, where the best we can do is a school-room. Have you introduced him?" she asked, turning to Godfrey. "Mr. Boynton's travelled; he's been in your place," she continued, addressing Lady Galbraith. "He might know some of your people."

Lady Galbraith drew her furs about her. She

had not the pleasure of Mr. Boynton's acquaintance. She believed that many Americans travelled abroad, probably for educational purposes. There was much the clergy especially could learn from contact with the Mother Church. She had observed several omissions in the service she could not but deprecate, and would take pleasure in pointing out to the Rev. Mr. Boynton. They might be the mistakes of youth; but at all events she must consider it her duty to remind him of the danger he ran in attempting to modernize so ancient a liturgy.

The smile left Milly's lips. There was almost a quiver of disappointment in their mobile lines. She had never imagined Godfrey's mother could be so very formidable a person, and was not prepared for her evident discontent with the methods which hitherto had seemed natural enough. She turned to the one who she thought could best understand her, and mutely asked for his support. Godfrey answered, though addressing his mother:

"The easiest way to convince you of the orthodoxy of the parson will be to present him, and let him state his own case. Will you permit me? Mr. Boynton, I want to introduce you to my mother, Lady Galbraith." With a look of relief Milly saw her place taken. Placing her trembling hand on Godfrey's arm, she urged rather than was led by him towards the open door.

The night was brilliant with the light of the risen moon. It shone softly on the settlement, on

the broad road, on the straggling group of houses, on the level waste lying beyond; the ugly buildings composing the little hamlet seemed less angular and unattractive standing indistinct and softened by the mellow light.

Leaving the heated school-room, with its sound of discordant voices, the two went out into the silent street. The houses showed few lights, as all their inhabitants, both old and young, had gathered in the school-room; so that Milly and Godfrey seemed alone in the deserted street. They walked quite to the end of the scattered settlement, where a small grove lent them shelter, before either of them spoke. Then, unclasping Godfrey's arm, Milly, suddenly turning, faced him. Her cheeks were burning, and her eyes on fire with pent-up excitement. Without preface, she exclaimed passionately:

"She does not like me; she never will. She looks upon me with the same contempt that she does upon the minister and the people and the service. Why did you not tell me that your mother was like that—cold and proud and contemptuous? Why did you not say she was not one bit like you, and that she would criticise me, and find faults and flaws?" She went on hotly: "Why did you not say she would compare me with all those fine ladies you used to know, and that are about as much like us" (this with a total disregard of pronouns) "as butterflies are like grubs? She wants you for one of them," she added, with intuitive

jealousy. "She does not want you to love me; she does not want you to marry me; she will not let you; she will take you away from me. O Godfrey, Godfrey! it is dreadful! I wish I were dead!"

She was sobbing convulsively, with her hands pressed against her face. Godfrey tried to take them in his own, but for the first time they resisted him.

"Don't, Milly, darling; don't cry so," he said soothingly. "You frighten me; you are nervous and tired. You will not feel like this to-morrow, when you have had time to think. Pray, dearest, stop sobbing for a moment and let me speak to you."

His own face looked white in the pale twilight, but he made a brave effort to master his voice, that Milly might not perceive his own anxiety.

"You must not judge my mother too hastily, dear. She is, perhaps, unlike any one you have yet known; but she has a kind heart. She has been a good mother, Milly; her sons must respect her."

"Yes, that's just it," broke in Milly, again letting her hands fall hopelessly: "it's because she's good and upright and true that she expects your obedience. She will not listen even to your affection; it will be just duty—cold, hard, relentless duty. She will say she is doing what is best, and that will be reason enough for riding roughshod over naked hearts. I am not of that world,

I know; I'm not like the girls she's used to. I was born out here on the prairie, and I haven't seen much besides; but something tells me that my love for you would teach me all the rest. O Godfrey, would you be ashamed of me?"

"Ashamed of you, my darling! what can you mean? It is my pride that I found you and loved you, and that you love me." He put his arm around her, drawing her to him. She still sobbed, but the passion of her tears had given way to a more contented indulgence in the memory of her grief. She leaned against him in silence for a few moments, and then raised her tear-stained face as a child might to be kissed and forgiven.

"Good-night," she said, "we must be going; the sociable is breaking up; you can hear the sleigh-bells. You will forgive me for not liking your mother?" she asked doubtingly. "It's only what you might expect; we are so different. But tell me you love me once again; it seems such an age since you spoke the words."

He smiled. "Such an exacting little girl! I love you, Milly, with all my heart; kiss me again. Good-night."

They hastened back along the road, already alive with merry voices and jingling sleigh-bells, just in time to hear Sandy exclaiming, as he handed Lady Galbraith into her sleigh:

"Do tell! who'd a-thought you'd be so put out at my calling you Mrs. Alleyne? Does 'pear as though they took a heap o' trouble in the Old

Country to mix things up. But I'm sure I do ask your pardon most humbly. I wouldn't like to brew no ill-will with Godfrey's mother, considerin' the nearness, and Milly, and all the rest. But here's Godfrey and Milly, I do declar'! I wonder whar they've been doin' their courtin'? I wish you good-evening, Lady Gal—"

But Milly did not wait for the completion of her father's amends; putting her arm through his, she drew him away.

"Take me home, father," she said wearily. "I want to go home."

The party at the Cross Roads had certainly proved disappointing to more than one of the participants. Lady Galbraith had not found in it that pleasing diversion she had anticipated. The drive home was a silent one. Even the glory of the glittering night failed to elicit from her either comment or enthusiasm. She had at last beheld the abyss over which her son hovered disclosed in all its threatening depths.

She acknowledged to herself that the girl was not without beauty, and that there was a certain charm in her fresh young voice; but as she dwelt upon her surroundings, the people with whom she associated—even the father whose child she was—she grew more intolerant than ever of her son's infatuation. Even her efforts to instil an appreciation of a more rigid ritual into the mind of the Rev. George Boynton had not met with the gratitude she had expected. He had listened indeed with

courteous attention, and had promised to ponder upon her suggestions ; but he had also urged that a people young in the Church and unaccustomed to ceremony were sometimes not as tolerant of form as those older nations who required many outward signs for the expression of their spiritual graces. Altogether Lady Galbraith was more confirmed than ever in her objection to levelling democracy. She went heavily to bed, weary with the evening's experiences. Not so Godfrey. He sat for long hours in front of the smouldering fire, with no thought of sleep. There were problems that perplexed him.

CHAPTER IX.

Snow now fell with a persistence only equalled by its long delay in appearing at all. Alternate frost and brilliant sunshine had formed that heavy crust over the surface which is the joy of these dwellers apart from the haunts of men. It means a more ready intercourse with the outside world, and an indulgence in those winter pastimes that come as a grateful interlude to the year of hard work. Already several parties had been organized for the shooting of wild game, to some of which Godfrey, as a stranger, was invited by his neighbors. The settlement of the land had, indeed, driven such sport further and further to the north and west, so that these expeditions often meant an absence of several days from home.

Sometimes soon after midnight the sound of jingling bells would announce the approach of sleighs filled with men and boys well equipped for a long expedition. The box of the sleigh was usually fastened to two sets of runners, and filled with fresh straw, this serving, with two fast-travelling hardy ponies, as their means of transport. A plentiful supply of bread, cold meat, and a demijohn of spirits were considered a part of the necessary outfit. A good camp-fire and the game shot

were supposed to furnish the luxuries of the expedition.

Clothed in buffalo-skin coats, with caps, gloves, and boots of the same hide; the sleighs filled high with whatever fur robes each could contribute to the general comfort, these merry parties would start on their long night drive over the glittering crust of even snow. Often not a fence or brush impeded their way for miles; with now and then a cheerful word to the horses, they sped on under the brilliant stars that shone like points of steely light in the deep blue of the heavens above them.

Godfrey enjoyed these expeditions above all things. The sparkling air seemed to brace his nerves like a draught of some exciting elixir. The speed, the silence, the novelty of the night journey, the company of strangers in pursuit of a sport that was new to him, were in themselves exhilarating. He had shot larger game in stranger places, but he could not remember ever to have felt the sensation of absolute excitement which thrilled his blood in these night journeys over the plains.

This was a time never to be forgotten. Godfrey felt the fascination of this free life as he did that of the illimitable view. He seemed to expand mentally as he grew physically in its life-giving beauty. Even the contact with his companions—men of small social qualifications certainly, yet betraying that depth of thought and comprehension which seems a result of untrammelled intercourse with Nature in her unveiled aspects—

widened his view. Godfrey's very soul seemed to quicken in these nightly readings of Nature's scroll. They were scenes destined to dwell in his memory and to exert their spell long after the actual environment was blotted from his life.

One day when Godfrey was absent on one of these expeditions Lady Galbraith determined to carry into execution a plan which for some time had been maturing in her mind. Since the night of the donation she had but once seen Milly, nor had she questioned her son, although she knew that he had on more than one occasion visited her. Indeed, he made no secret of his occasional absences, and had endeavored, though futilely, to win his mother to accompany him. Once Sandy and his daughter, dressed in their Sunday clothes, had driven over to pay a visit of ceremony on Godfrey's mother, but either the unusual assumption of Sunday costume on a week-day or else some slight appreciation of Lady Galbraith's antagonistic attitude caused Sandy's intermittent reserve to assume an impenetrable resistance. Godfrey was unable to call from him any natural response to his own efforts at entertainment. Nor did he succeed much better with Milly, who seemed frozen to a mere unyielding image of her usual self. The conversation was constrained, and at last would have died altogether except for Godfrey's heroic efforts.

Finally, when handing Milly into the sleigh, he managed to hold her hand for a moment between his own.

"Don't mind anything, love," were the only words he found to urge as comfort, but the tearful eyes turned upon him, that smiling lips rendered only the more appealing, told him that Milly did mind, and that her very heart was wounded. He might as well have asked a bird with an arrow through its breast not to mind. Could he have foreseen how the gentle heart was to quiver under a more fatal thrust, it is doubtful whether his boyish laughter would have rung out over the white world again that day.

His mother, however, matured her preparations. She called Jackson and gave him minute directions as to her journey, for she had decided to take him as coachman and guide over the plain to Sandy's. Somewhat late in the afternoon they arrived at the square unattractive dwelling. Lady Galbraith descended and stood before the door, waiting for her summons to be answered. The sound of her announcement had apparently not been heeded, for a girlish voice sang on in undisturbed rise and fall. The words and air were plaintive, but lost something of their prophetic sadness in the glad full tone of the singer's voice :

> Dinna forget, laddie, dinna forget,
> Ne'er make me rue that ever we ha' met;
> Wide though we sever, parted for ever,
> Laddie, when far awa dinna forget.

Lady Galbraith drew off her sealskin glove, and rapped a little impatiently. The girl's voice

ceased; she came hastily with wondering eyes to open the door and admit her visitor. She drew back almost alarmed at finding herself face to face with Godfrey's mother. But her inborn sense of hospitality did not permit of hesitation. She held out her hand, saying, "How do you do, Lady Galbraith? Where is Godfrey? I suppose you haven't come without him. I suppose he is somewheres about; you don't like our country well enough to take solitary sleigh rides of so many miles." Her sentences had the upward inflection of all her tones, but Lady Galbraith evidently thought the questions implied needed some special notice.

"Yes, I am well, thank you, Miss Alistair; and I'm alone except for Jackson. I cannot pretend to like your country, nor the long strange drives one takes without guide-posts or road to show one the way or indicate where one is likely to find oneself. Nevertheless, I have come without my son, and with the object, I may say, of seeing you alone. I hope you don't object to my unloosening the furs with which I am obliged to protect myself. It is almost impossible for me to speak at present."

"Allow me," Milly said; but her hands trembled as she unfastened the sable and sealskin at her visitor's throat.

"Thank you, thank you, my dear," Lady Galbraith said, settling herself in an armchair near the fire. She did not doubt the reasonableness and

good sense of this young person when once shown the falseness of the position she occupied. After all, it was not easy for her to begin, and no harm could come of this small condescension.

Milly stood with her slight figure drawn to its fullest height, her hands, loosely clasped, hanging before her. The dark blue of her simple dress brought out the delicate tints of her hair and skin, while its severe outline seemed to accentuate her youth.

Lady Galbraith cleared her throat, and said she feared her old enemy, bronchitis; she would not have ventured upon such exposure for any other reason than the one named. Milly made no reply, and Lady Galbraith coughed again. It was very annoying; she believed she must try another troche. Had Milly ever used them? No; Milly had never had a cough. She was perfectly well. The elder woman looked at her with a certain envy. There, surely, was one gift, then, that could neither be bought nor inherited. The thought served as an irritant, and brought her back to the stern duty before her. She would neither hesitate nor delay.

"Yes, as I was about to say, the climate is exceedingly trying—not one that either man or woman should encounter who possesses liberty of action. I am persuading dear Godfrey to feel in this matter as I do. In the spring I shall hope to take him back with me to England."

"To England?" Milly repeated. "He hasn't

spoken to me of going," she ventured tremblingly; "but then—ah, yes, for a visit. It is very natural he should want to go home for a visit. I'm sure I should," she went on, laughing a little hysterically, "if I lived away from here. It doesn't look so very attractive, does it?" she asked. "I suppose you wouldn't guess how fond I am of our country? Godfrey is, too," she continued desperately. "He says he likes its vastness and the feeling of freedom an unlimited horizon gives one. I'm sure I can't tell what that means exactly, but I know he likes it."

"In moments of enthusiasm my son, doubtless, has made use of these expressions you quote. Young men easily adopt new methods, a new people, a new country, even new friends. I trust you do not take as quite serious the natural enthusiasm of youth. My son cannot in reality be blind to the advantages of his own land and race. He will return to them after this little—experience"—she had paused for a suitable word—"and forget that he has ever lived away from them."

"Forget!" murmured Milly, scarcely comprehending what she heard. "Forget his life here! ah, that could not be! Even if he left here and gave up all his plans for improving the farm and all, he would still have me. I could not forget, no matter where I lived. I would always remember the first springing green that seems to cover the earth like a mantle in one short night. I should always remember the miles of waving grain

that turns to gold, and that seems always whispering in the soft breeze. I should remember the pine slope, and the Cross Roads, and this house, and Jim and Hannah; and O, papa I *could* not forget, and Godfrey could not, either."

She had laced her slender fingers one within another, which she nervously clasped tighter than before; tears stood in her eyes at the thought of what she might be called upon to hold dear only in memory, but as yet no deeper unhappiness dimmed them.

For youth there are so many possibilities, such endless expedients, that the pain of foreboding seldom lays hold upon it for long. The real significance of Lady Galbraith's words did not reach Milly. She was conscious only of a feeling of uneasiness in the presence of the elder woman who thus looked upon her coldly, almost distrustfully. She experienced a desire to prove to her that Godfrey's interests concerned her as vitally as they did the one who spoke so confidently of his plans.

"He would not be absent long?" she asked doubtingly; "he is perhaps intending to take the journey that you may not be alone."

"You mistake," replied Lady Galbraith. "My son will doubtless have arranged by then to sever all connection with the West. He will probably accept an offer made by a friend who wishes to invest here; will make over his farm to him, and will return to England to remain. He has family interests which must displace the slight ties he

has formed here. When a man is born to Godfrey's position he must think of upholding it worthily before all else. This experience has, I dare say, been of service to him, but he must not think of wasting his life here. No, he must return and prepare to settle down. His engagement to his cousin has been of long standing, and my dearest wish is to live to witness its consummation."

Lady Galbraith was unable to face her victim lest some show of agony in the young face should weaken her resolve. She was not by nature either hard or cruel. She could not remember ever to have dreaded an interview so much or felt less satisfaction in performing an obvious duty. She played with the sable tails of her mantle lest she should be betrayed into some other demonstration of emotion.

Milly's hands were no longer clasped before her. She had staggered back a step or two to where a tall straight-backed chair gave her support, and now with both hands was clutching the polished rounds to save herself from falling.

"Godfrey engaged!" she repeated, as though trying to fit a possible meaning to the words she spoke. Her lips parted dryly, and she made one or two ineffectual efforts before the words became audible. "Godfrey is engaged," she said, "engaged to be married to me. He has never spoken of any other wish or told me of what you speak."

"This is a very serious business, I am afraid, Miss

"Milly had sunk upon the cushions of the chair, with her head drooping against its high back."

Alistair," began Lady Galbraith. "I cannot hide from you the truth. If Godfrey has imprudently spoken to you words he should never have uttered, if he has led you to believe that he was free to marry you or any other young girl of your birth and position, then I, as his mother, am the first to condemn him. He must for the moment have been blind to all the obligations of his past life. Do you realize that my son may one day stand at the head of one of the oldest and most honorable families in the kingdom ? It is not, I own, a probable event. His eldest brother, thank God ! is alive and well, while his two young sons are as promising as children need be ; but stranger things have happened. I ask you, do you feel you would be showing him your truest love by carrying out his mistaken fancy, thereby hampering his future with a bond he could not break ? Or do you rise to the sacrifice of self which I point out, and for his sake free him now and for ever? "

Milly had sunk upon the cushions of the chair, with her head drooping against its high back. All color had left her face, but deep violet circles settling about her eyes seemed to have intensified their shade and expression. Lady Galbraith, looking up, was startled at the change a few moments had wrought.

"I do not say that I am asking a small thing of you, my child," she said, her voice faltering a little. "I do not belittle the sacrifice, but I solemnly avow what I believe to be the truth—that God-

frey will live to bless you for setting him free."

Milly's eyes were closed now, while great tears forced themselves through the sealed lids and rolled unheeded down her pale cheeks. Could this be really true, she asked herself, these hard words which stabbed, each one as a knife might, her quivering flesh. Had she been existing in a fools' paradise, loving and living only in the light that ought never to have shone for her? Was Godfrey, then, not to be trusted, and had he in all these months been only amusing himself that he might not dwell too sadly on past happiness? She could not believe it. Not a look she recalled, or a tone of his voice, but what said to her plainer than any words, "Godfrey loves you." Whatever may have been before and belonged, as many other memories must, to those bygone days, now, at least, she felt he was all her own. Should she wound him as well as herself by this renunciation? She did not know. He certainly was above her, far above her, from every worldly point of view; but, after all, he had not yet gone back to that other life, possibly she could prevail upon him never to do so. There might, indeed, be a chance, so remote as to scarcely need consideration, that he would one day stand at the head of his house, but one couldn't for ever be balancing such remote possibilities. He was Godfrey now—Godfrey, her own promised husband. What could any one, even his mother, mean by trying to set aside a

bond so vital? She loved him with her whole heart, and she believed that he loved her. She would not give him up, not unless he should ask it of her, not until she was convinced that their union was no longer his wish.

The silence that had fallen between them was of such duration that Lady Galbraith was at last constrained to break it.

"Have you decided that my son shall return to his old life, free to follow the dictates of his heart and good sense? Shall I carry the word back to him that will render him free?"

The tears no longer dropped one by one on Milly's clasped hands; her eyes were dry and burned brightly, while two hot spots on either cheek had changed her stricken face to childish energy again. She sprang again from her chair. She even stood defiantly before her visitor, while she twisted into a shapeless knot the tiny handkerchief with which she dried her eyes.

"No, no!" she exclaimed vehemently; "I will not release Godfrey except at his own request. You have no right to come here with words he has never spoken. I do not believe he loves any one but me—not this cousin you say he is engaged to, and who is, I suppose, a grand lady too. He speaks of her often to me, and has told me she would love me for the sake of their childhood together and the sisterly love she bore him; but he's never said he intended to marry her—never."

"You don't understand," Lady Galbraith be-

gan coldly; "these things are arranged differently with us. There is something sterner to be considered than a lawless fancy, or the indulging of a passing whim. Marriage is too serious a matter to be entered upon lightly when a man must preserve the unstained purity of his line."

Milly shook her head wearily; she did not understand Lady Galbraith's argument. She comprehended only that this duel was to the death; to save her life she must stand fast. First, she must be convinced that Godfrey would not suffer; then possibly it would be easier to lay down her arms and own herself vanquished. Lady Galbraith rose to depart; she haughtily drew her mantle about her, declining all assistance.

"I will trouble you to have my man called. I have a long drive before me."

Milly went out through the kitchen, giving the necessary order, but when she returned she held a little tray in her hand, on which were a glass of wine and some cake. Despite the feeling of antagonism which Lady Galbraith roused in her, she could not forget the sense of hospitality which was inherent in her nature.

Lady Galbraith declined the offer; she was not in a mood for partaking of any refreshment. No; she would be obliged to Milly if she would hasten Jackson's preparations. Her visit had been accomplished, and she was anxious to return. In a few minutes the sleigh was at the door, and, with

Jackson's help, his mistress was secured against the attacks of wind and weather. With a frigid "Good-afternoon" to Milly, whom she left standing in the doorway, Lady Galbraith turned her face homewards.

CHAPTER X.

THERE are times when an added sense seems joined to those material ones by which we commonly receive impressions. Some quickened intelligence is ready then to convey to the brain not only what is visible or tangible, but a subtle prescience of what could not otherwise be known. The timeworn terms by which we recognize this attribute—presentiment, forewarning, what you will—as often provoke a smile as any serious consideration; but, whether we scoff or believe, we must each at some time have been startled by an inward spiritual flash, and have yielded a recognition of some kind to the incomprehensible messenger.

A subtle forewarning of this kind was keeping pace with Lady Galbraith as she journeyed homewards. The further she travelled away from her late disturbing interview the more vividly she became impressed with an undefinable sense of apprehension. She would now, had she been able, have turned to even the unwelcome thought of her recent visit, as a relief against this encroaching sense of unrest. She urged Jackson to greater haste in driving, and yet, could she have consist-

ently reversed her orders, she would have as impetuously restrained him as they came within sight of her son's house.

She said to herself that her nerves were strangely shaken by the interview with Milly. She could not have believed it possible that a mere girl, not of her own class, could so have unsettled her; neither could she have anticipated so complete a rout where she had too confidently planned a victory. However, it was all of a piece with her preconceived ideas of this "young person," as she named Milly. She wondered almost that she had condescended to ordinary argument, as would be the case in dealing with a more cultured product of an older soil. She did not altogether regret her visit, feeling the backbone of accomplished duty her strength, even in defeat. It cannot be denied that a feeling bordering on resentment, if not the more undignified one of anger, had at first stirred Lady Galbraith's heart after parting with Milly, but this had given way before the more pressing one of anticipated ill which now possessed her.

The drive had been a long one, and the wind, sharp as frost-needles, met the travellers full in their faces. Lady Galbraith was weary from the unusual conflict her visit had inspired, but more acutely depressed by reason of physical discomfort. She longed for the cheery fireside and Margaret's ministrations. She pityingly called herself an old woman, and not fit for such rough journeyings. She blamed herself that she could no longer sur-

mount what would have appeared but trifles in former days. She must be growing old, she said again, to have succumbed at the beck of nervous imaginings. She grew more and more apprehensive, nevertheless, as they approached the farm-house.

Godfrey was still absent, she supposed, with the hunting-party he had joined some days previous; yet, as she came within sight of the house, she was scarcely surprised to find him standing in the open doorway. Every thought naturally centred around her son; therefore her vague forebodings had of necessity hovered about him as their pivot of being. The unreasoning sense of dread that had chilled her heart, making the way doubly long, gave place at the sight of him to one of thankful relief. Yet it was with trembling lips she forced a smile to greet him; even with her hand in his she could not shake off the shadowy oppression that possessed her. She leaned heavily on his arm as he helped her to alight, and led her in beside the bright fireside.

She repeated that she was glad to be at home again, but decided that this was not the time to recount the object or result of her visit. She contented herself with more general inquiries concerning the pleasure of his expedition and the reason for his early return. Something at length in his mechanical replies, or the tone of forced cheerfulness he used, arrested Lady Galbraith's attention. She turned, regarding him more closely. Again

she fell to trembling, all her past dread rushing back upon her with overmastering force.

"What has happened, Godfrey?" she asked breathlessly. "Why do you look so strangely? Something unlooked for and terrible has befallen us. For hours I have been possessed with a vague alarm, and now I know by your look that you have ill news for me."

Godfrey took a telegram from an inner pocket of his coat, and came and knelt beside his mother's chair.

"Ah," she said; "my children! Something has befallen them! You have news from home?" She sank back heavily against the chair.

"Yes, dear mother, I have sad news indeed. I fear you will be greatly distressed, yet I cannot keep it from you." He paused, scarcely knowing how to proceed. "It is about Bertie's children—the two little men. Can you bear to hear what I must tell you?"

Lady Galbraith's face, laid back against the chair, looked ashen and crumpled, like withered white rose-leaves; but unconsciously she straightened herself to meet the blow, feeling the power of *noblesse* even in this moment of supreme dread.

"The little fellows have been very ill," Godfrey began cautiously, "very ill indeed; both stricken with that scourge to children, diphtheria."

"And?" Lady Galbraith's rigid lips formed.

"And," repeated her son, "you must bear their loss with your own accustomed fortitude. Gwen-

dolen telegraphs that they died within a few hours of each other, after a brief illness."

"My dear little ones!" was all that Lady Galbraith could utter brokenly. She seemed bowed with the weight of the blow, and the stamp of years could no longer be concealed by any effort of will. She sobbed brokenly, after the manner of old age, but presently her mind turned to those whose loss was heavier than her own. "My poor son! my poor Lilian! What of them?"

"It is very sad," explained Godfrey. "They have no word from Bertie, and cannot tell whether the news has reached him yet; and Lilian lies dangerously ill, raving of her children night and day."

"God help her!" murmured Lady Galbraith; but, with her natural energy again reasserting itself, she exclaimed: "When can we go to them? How soon be beside dear Lilian's bedside?"

"Gwen begs that we may come at once, by the first steamer, but that would mean immediate preparation and incessant travelling, were you able to undertake the journey."

"Do not think of me. I am able and ready for any fatigue; only let us start as soon as the preparations can be made. It is maddening to waste time here, when we are needed so sorely at home. When can we start? Every minute's delay seems unbearable."

"We should have to start very early to-morrow morning," replied her son, "if we would catch the steamer leaving New York on Saturday."

"It is not too soon; I shall be ready," said Lady Galbraith, starting up; but she sank back again, yielding to the weakness she could not withstand. Godfrey gently assisted her to her room, promising to make all the preparations necessary for their departure in the morning.

But he went about his arrangements with a heavy heart. He knew that he must yield to an exigency he could not resist, and for which he was unprepared; but he did so with untold reluctance. The thought of a return to England had been so remote, in spite of his mother's allusion to such a chance, that he could not bring himself to look upon it now as inevitable. While he packed his trunks and instructed his overseer, making such hasty plans as were possible, he seemed to walk and speak in the fictitious light of a dream. His thoughts were hurried and confused, and always afterwards when he thought of that night it seemed to him the most indefinite in his existence. Sorrow for the untoward death of his young nephews; sympathy for his brother, enduring alone and in a far land the shock of his grievous loss; anxiety for Lilian, who, unable to bear the snatching away of her little ones, lay ill in body and mind—possibly unto death; solicitude for Gwendolen, his boyhood's friend, almost sister: all mingled and stirred his heart as he hastily prepared for his departure. But, above all, rose the image of Milly. How could he leave her? How would she meet this unexpected change—

how endure the loneliness and suspense of his absence?

During the early part of the night he had cherished the hope of saving from the flying hours sufficient time to ride hurriedly to Sandy's and carry the news of his unlooked-for recall to England. He would then be able to speak the farewell words that would soften the pain of parting. As the night advanced he still found much to accomplish before the dawn, and at length reluctantly admitted that written words must carry his message. Towards evening the house resumed its usual quiet. Trunks and portmanteaus stood piled by the doorway; robes of fur and wool, baskets containing refreshment for the following day, and every provision that thought or care could devise, were ready for the long cold journey.

The fire was low on the hearth, but Godfrey had no time to notice his own discomfort. Drawing his chair to the table, he prepared to speak his farewell to Milly in the only way left him. He wrote long and rapidly, and when the last "God be with you!" had been added to the final page the clock warned him that it was time to be on the way.

It had been decided that Jackson and Margaret should accompany their master and mistress to England, returning later with Godfrey if they desired it.

Soon, in the gloomy darkness of a frosty winter's morning, the four turned their faces eastward,

leaving the shadow of Godfrey's Western home scarcely discernible in the fast-increasing distance. Catching a last glimpse of the familiar scene, Godfrey acknowledged with a sigh that he was bidding adieu to much that had grown dear to him.

Before daylight the travellers arrived at the Cross Roads ; no one was stirring as yet about the post-office, nor was there any sign of life in the village. Leaving the sleigh for a moment, Godfrey tried, by the help of a lighted match, to find a post-box, or whatever equivalent the Cross Roads afforded, in which to deposit his letters. Aided by the flaring light, he soon discovered a square piece of tin inserted in lieu of glass in one of the windows. Over an irregular slit made through its centre had been scratched with a sharpened nail the word "Leters." Through this he hastily thrust the one intended for Milly, waiting to hear it drop on the bare boards of the floor within. For a moment there flashed through his mind a recollection of the scene in which he had played a conspicuous part some months previous ; the irresponsible attitude of the postmaster on that occasion recurred to him now. With a quick change of intention he would gladly have withdrawn the letter, had he been able, intrusting it to some more reliable custody than Jake's. He tried the door, hoping to find it unlocked and to repossess himself of the letter, but an unwonted care on the part of the postmaster had rendered the

idea impossible of fulfilment. The door was securely fastened. Godfrey shook it with some annoyance. He was almost inclined to force the door from its hinges and secure the letter at all hazards, but he reflected that this was the day Sandy always rode over to the post-office to get his letters, and that he would run the risk of a week's delay should he carry Milly's on with him to post at some more important station. Besides, no matter where he consigned the letter to the mail, it must still arrive at the post-office of the Cross Roads. Moreover, time was pressing. There must be sharp driving to reach the nearest railway station in time for the eastern-bound express. Hastily seizing the reins again, he urged on the horses, and soon the hamlet of the Cross Roads had joined the widening plain that gradually separated the travellers from the West.

Arriving at New York early the following Saturday, Godfrey discovered that the ship he intended to embark in would not leave until late in the afternoon. This would give him time to secure suitable cabins and make other arrangements for their comfort on board. He would also have an opportunity to visit his bankers, hoping to find there further news of Gwendolen. She, he thought, counting on their immediate departure, would doubtless send all messages to the banking-house accustomed to receive and forward his correspondence. Leaving his mother comfortably established at an hotel not far distant, he hastened down that

crowded, noisy, narrow thoroughfare that bears the misleading name "Broadway."

He soon found the well-known house he was seeking, and entered. One of the clerks, recognizing him before he was able to make inquiries, thrust some letters with two cable messages into his hand. With the nervous haste that seems a leading characteristic of business men in every department of this hurrying city, the employé hastened away before Godfrey could utter so much as "Thank you," and was again bent double in the service of the next applicant.

A long sofa or cushioned bench ran along the wall, and to this, following the example of others, Godfrey retired to open and read his letters. He was gravely anxious for news, and scarcely waited to seat himself before tearing open one of the yellowish envelopes he held. He expected word from Gwendolen concerning Lilian and his brother, but what he read was so totally unlike his expectations that he did not at first comprehend the meaning contained in the words. The message was signed with the name of the family solicitors, and read as follows: "Lord Galbraith drowned the 17th—Australia—come immediately."

Nothing beyond the cold bare announcement, conveyed with that economy of phrase that appears a triumph of condensed intelligence to the sender, while apparently no thought of the effect produced softens its calculated brevity.

Godfrey read and reread the short sentence be-

fore the dread meaning of the unshaded fact seemed to dawn upon him. Thoughts of the most foreign nature flashed through his brain while he still mechanically repeated the words. Scenes that had been forgotten since childhood obtruded themselves with startling vividness upon his mind's vision. Memories of his father and of Bertie became curiously confused with the scene before him. Quick-footed men came and went, asking high-pitched sharped-toned questions of the clerks still bending over the counter; uniformed messengers of diminutive stature with careworn faces handed books or cheques to attentive employés, and received messages or carried notes sufficient to have represented the entire reserve of some less important establishments. Godfrey beheld the practical routine going on about him without being able to separate the real from the unreal. Finally, the thought of Bertie, his loved brother, his childhood's hero, his pride in later days, associated itself more clearly with the announcement he held in his hand. A mist rose between him and the busy throng coming and going.

He attempted to rise, that he might shake off what still appeared to him a frightful nightmare. He must be dreaming, he said; what harm could touch Bertie in his vigorous manhood? It was senseless to say he was drowned, for there was not a swimmer he knew anywhere to compare with him! Could he not remember how, even as a boy, he had excelled his comrades in endurance and

"A mist rose between him and the busy throng coming and going."

speed in competitions of skill in the water? Would he be likely, even if the victim of some accident, to succumb when others gave out? It could not be! There was absurdity on the face of it! He would not believe that such an unnatural fate had overtaken Bertie! He opened the other envelope, and found the cable signed by Gwendolen. This but confirmed the solicitors' business-like despatch, and again begged Godfrey to lose no time in coming to them.

Many persons had come and gone during the few minutes of Godfrey's bewilderment; one or two had joined him on the bench by the window, and one transacting business at the counter had observed him closely. Godfrey attempted to reach the door, but he felt strangely weak, almost as though a deadly sickness had passed over him since the time when he entered the bank. The fatigue of his recent journey, coupled with the grief and anxiety he had already undergone, had not prepared him for this last heavy blow. He passed his hand across his eyes to clear them of the blinding mist that for a second shut out everything—even light. He sank again upon the leather-covered bench, looking ill and faint.

The clerk who had at first recognized him and handed him his letters came out through a swinging gate that shut in the executive part of the bank from the outer thoroughfare, and offered Godfrey a glass of water, while the young man,

who had apparently recognized him, came hastily forwards, exclaiming,

"Why, Alleyne, my dear fellow, I thought I knew you! But what on earth ails you? You look as though you had seen a ghost, or were dying yourself! For Heaven's sake come to your senses, and try to tell me what I can do for you."

Godfrey gladly took the offered hand, realizing that his friend Alexander Hope had opportunely appeared from somewhere, and would, he thought, aid him in regaining mastery of himself. He pointed to the open messages he held by way of explaining what he could not yet frame in words. His companion read them, as indicated.

"What a melancholy end for poor Bertie!" he exclaimed with feeling; "overwhelming, indeed, in its suddenness. I don't wonder you are knocked up! Any one would be. Come out into the air, and I will walk as far as your hotel with you, while you will have time to pull yourself together. It is a bad business altogether. I noticed the death of the little fellows in one of the newspapers a few nights ago, and was not altogether surprised to find you here. On your way to Bainhurst, I suppose?"

The young man talked on without waiting for a reply, giving Godfrey a chance to indulge in his own thoughts, and the better to recover control of himself.

Godfrey never forgot that walk. It seemed to him as though he were led, rather than that he

proceeded by force of his own volition, through an endless crowd of jostling, pushing, eager-faced beings. No one had time or inclination to bestow even a passing glance upon him. He seemed but an unimportant atom in a moving mass of busy life, or, rather, like some disembodied spirit that could perceive by reason of some added sense, and yet could not be seen. The roar of the street, scraps of conversation, the tone of eager voices, the brilliant winter's light glittering upon the façade of many-storied buildings, the youthful messengers old before their time with the weight of important missions, even the occasional flash of a woman's face or dress—all wrote themselves in indelible colors on his excited brain. Years afterwards he could have recalled even the features of certain individuals of that throng.

The human mind is so receptive, so many-sided, so complex, that who can limit its range? In moments like these there is roused in us almost a supernatural activity that takes cognizance of the most trifling detail as easily as it notes the gravest facts. A strange capacity for receiving impressions seems awakened; the spiritual and the commonplace become curiously blended, until we appear, even to ourselves, unreal.

Observant of all that was passing around him, Godfrey's mind held but one distinct thought. How should he approach his mother, carrying as he did this weight of sorrow? How could he prepare her for this added calamity, or save her from

the crushing power of the shock? He turned over in his mind a dozen different plans for breaking the news to her, but each seemed more cruel than the last. She was already weakened by a long, forced journey, when mental distress had rendered her least able to encounter fatigue. He looked at his watch. There was scarcely time to reach the ship before the hour for sailing. Fearing some worse result should he abruptly announce what had befallen them and with no time to soften the tidings by preparation, he at last resolved to postpone the telling of his sad tale until they were fairly out at sea. Possibly by that time his mother would have regained something of her customary vigor, and be better able to meet the blow.

Hope had meantime explained his fortunate appearance. He was on his way westward, he explained. Indeed, he had intended to look up Godfrey in his distant home, and ask his advice about investment and settling, and many other matters of importance to himself.

"But now," he continued, "I suppose you will scarcely think of returning. You will have finished with farming in America and settle down on your own estates."

Godfrey turned almost a startled face upon him.

"Not return?" he asked curiously. "Why, yes; of course I shall. My interests are all in Minnesota. I have no thought of remaining away. There are stronger reasons for my return than you perhaps are aware of."

"There were reasons, I know, but I fancied now you might go in for something different. A new position means different interests. You might scarcely have time for wheat and cattle and all that."

"I had forgotten for a moment," Godfrey replied sadly. "I cannot tell what my plans may be. My life is certainly very much changed. I may not be as free as in past days. If you find yourself near 'Sydney's' at any time, make it your home. Use the place as though it belonged to you. I have not said a final farewell to it, and I hope to find you there on my return. I am sure to go back," he added emphatically.

Reaching the door of the hotel, they shook hands cordially, and with his friend's last words, "You mustn't mind my congratulating as well as sympathizing with you, Lord Galbraith," still sounding in his ears, Godfrey went in to find his mother.

CHAPTER XI.

A CLOUDLESS summer sky bent over the domain of Bainhurst; it shone upon the gray turrets of the ancient Castle, and touched with golden light the clinging green of ivy-covered towers. Tender rays sought the cool dim vistas of the forest, and laid in placid warmth on meadow and upland. They hovered about the gardens and crept upon the terraces approaching the house. But on one side the shadow of the great irregular pile stretched, leaving a space of grateful shade, wherein a group of four persons had gathered in anticipation of that most social hour devoted to afternoon tea.

The party had not long to wait, for the well-trained James understood his duties too well to appear a minute late with his tray and tea-kettle. This function was usually delegated by the portly servitor to a younger member of the establishment, but of late he had laid aside some of the dignity of his superior office in view of the family affliction. It would not do to trust the serving of "my ladies" to any upstart footman, who understood nothing of the sympathy conveyed in an appropriately folded napkin, or would miss his opportunities in the matter of handing spoons.

Placing the tray before the youngest member of

the party—a graceful girl with shining chestnut colored hair—James departed in the same automatic manner in which he had appeared; silken hose, brilliant buttons, and powdered hair appearing but an embodiment of an eternal family service. One was almost led to question the probability of that dual existence which includes soul in regarding the faithful butler, and would not have been surprised if, the mechanism giving out at last, he had been tinkered up to serve as a second-hand automaton in a family of less distinction.

Nevertheless, as James departed with measured tread and chin well up, he was saying to himself, "Now that the hold m'lady and the young m'lady is hable to hair theirsel'es on the terris, it happears as 'ow Chawles wouldn't be houter place 'andin' tea." Having arrived at this dignified conclusion, he went in to announce the same in the housekeeper's room.

Gwendolen was at this moment remarking, with the most indulgent of smiles as she glanced at Godfrey stretched upon the grass, "I do believe, Godfrey, that you grow more indolent every day! You positively have let me carry the bread-plate twice to Lilian, and have never offered to stir from your indulgent attitude. Will you have one lump or two?"

"Two; thanks awfully. I am restraining myself to please you, dear girl. You know your chief source of happiness lies in these small acts of self-abnegation. I should consider myself personi-

fied selfishness to deprive you of the privilege of carrying bread to Lilian or tea to my mother, sacrifice though it is to me. By the way, what may I do for you? Try some tea-cake?"

"No, I cannot be coaxed," replied Gwendolen, smiling. "Here, old fellow, come to tea," she called to a beautiful Irish setter, that at a little distance waited with wistful eyes the signal to approach. Taking up his place at his mistress's feet, he received the daintily folded morsels of bread that were his portion of the repast.

"I believe you would go without your meals to make any one—even Boncœur—happy," remarked Lilian languidly.

She was lying rather than sitting in a long willow chair, supported by numerous cushions of delicate tints. Her sad young face and wasted figure told in every line the pathetic story of her broken life. She was dressed in a long soft gown of white, and reminded one of those fragile garden lilies that are so beautiful in their short day, but can withstand no blast of storm or tempest.

Stricken to the earth by the loss of her children, there seemed little hope of her recovery. After weeks of ceaseless watching, she returned to a consciousness that was again to be clouded, if not destroyed, by the knowledge of her husband's death. For weeks her life hung by that fragile thread that is ready to evade even the most watchful care.

Gwendolen was her constant companion in those days, guarding with sisterly devotion every sign of

reviving strength and nourishing each symptom of renewed health. Lilian's youth could be counted upon to do more towards her restoration than skill of practised healer, and to this Gwendolen clung when wise doctors shook their heads. Even when her aunt's return demanded from her a divided duty, she did not relinquish her place beside Lilian. Tenderly she nursed her back to life and strength, until to-day, for the first time, she enjoyed the reward of seeing her once more in her place among them.

Those had been trying months of ceaseless anxiety, and there was little wonder that traces of care were visible even in Gwendolen's youthful face. She was slighter in form than before the days of their trial, but had lost nothing of her grace and personal charm thereby. As she bent over the tea-tray, in her simple dress of clinging black, she looked more lovely than ever before. Godfrey, examining her critically, must have been struck with the fact, for he vouchsafed the frank opinion that "it became Gwen to look a little pale and interesting," and impudently demanded "how she managed the violet pencillings about her eyes?" For reply he heard that his manners had not improved during his absence, and if this could be attributed to the freedom of the West, a more conventional existence must be preferred. Turning to her aunt, Gwendolen questioned if "the bond of cousinship also included that of critic and mentor?"

Lady Galbraith, leaning back against her cushioned chair, regarded her children with an habitual smile of affectionate indulgence. The smile, however, remained curiously fixed, changing only when she was directly addressed. She looked older and less vigorous than before her journey to the New World. A strong crutch-stick resting beside her chair suggested growing infirmities.

She had never recovered from the shock of her son's death, following as it did a mental strain that had encroached upon her powers of resistance. She had sunk under the blow, nerveless, powerless, prostrate. Her coming home had been a blank page in her memory, and only by degrees had events shaped themselves again in her remembrance. She never willingly referred to her experience in America. And, indeed, that time was associated with so much that was painful, that both Godfrey and Gwendolen had learned not to dwell upon it.

She had not spoken of Milly to either of them, and any reference to Godfrey's possible return to America awakened an irritability that acted adversely upon her physical condition. They had become used to indulging her whims and humoring her passing moods, much as one yields to the fancies of a delicate child.

With an effort to speak naturally, she replied to Gwendolen, "You mustn't mind what Godfrey says. Have you forgotten what a tease he used to be when you were children together? You never

appealed to me in those days, but settled all your little disputes with each other. You surely haven't outgrown the old sympathies?"

No, Gwendolen hoped they had not, but had she questioned herself more closely, she would have had to admit that a sense of reserve had grown up between them that had not existed in those old days. Whose fault it was she could not have told, but she realized that for some reason the boy-and-girl confidence no longer endured.

Whatever may be said of the power of mind to bridge all distances, and to live, by the force of imagination only, the life of those from whom we are apart, the fact remains that immediate interests are more completely absorbing. They often are able to dull the actuality of a more remote communion, and lessen in some degree the realization of personal responsibility naturally felt towards those from whom we are separated.

Godfrey did not forget Milly. He would have said that her memory played as important a part in his every-day existence as her presence had a few months previous. The thought of her still governed his life and influenced his plans. Indeed, his thoughts turned to her as a source of blessed relief in the days of perplexity that followed his home-coming. He found repose in dwelling upon that simple life of which she had been a part. He experienced that sensation of refreshment that one might feel in ceasing to trace the intricate pattern of a tapestried wall, turning from

its complicated design to the open glory of field and woodland.

There was a reviving freshness in the memory even of her ringing laugh and the changing light of her loving eyes. Godfrey told himself over and over that he waited impatiently for the moment when he should be free to go to her. He drew pictures in his imagination of that time: how he would arrive one day at Sandy's, no word preparing Milly for his coming, and, riding to the very door unannounced, would perhaps hear the strains of "Dinna forget, laddie" plaintively sung, and would know that she was thinking of her own laddie and longing for his coming. Then quietly he would slip in, and, while she still lamented, throw both arms around her, watching the light of welcome dawn in her eyes, and yet grow dim with a mist of joyful tears. He could almost hear her voice and feel her clinging arms. At such moments he grew impatient of all that stood in the way of their reunion. Even Sandy's unshorn locks and neglected dress would have been welcome adjuncts could they have appeared beside the portrait so often framed in his mind.

But his thoughts did not stop here. Milly must be transplanted from that home in the West, he said. She must learn to thrive in a soil she had not grown in; she must breathe an air she was not born to; she must be cut off from all past associations—Hannah, the "help," even Sandy himself. She must assimilate the different claims of

a new existence. Nothing must be left of the old, but in its place she would find ease, luxury, wealth, a position women might envy, and, above all, the devotion promised her in the beginning. Yes, there was but one way: the wheat farm must be abandoned for an English home; a humble life filled with deprivation must be exchanged for one of inherited luxury. The plans they had laid for improving Godfrey's farm until it should be the envy of the neighborhood, the pride of the State, had lost their importance in his estimation. Indeed, they were already forgotten.

He would bring Milly home to storied lands, where every rood could tell its tale of romance and had added a page to history; to a roof that had been the refuge of kings; to a fireside that the rulers of men had shared. Stranger things had happened; and who would say he transgressed the prestige of his ancestry by marrying the woman he loved?

Besides, there was his promise to Milly; and did not this forestall all questions? Moreover, he loved her, and that would alone bind him, though thousands of miles parted, and barriers sterner than any material ones divided them.

He had fallen into a habit of reasoning with himself that, had his mind been analytical, would have suggested a certain distrust of his own loyalty.

Sometimes he was on the point of confiding his perplexities to Gwendolen. He remembered how

he had in more youthful days relied upon her counsel, and been led by her judgment; but he was withheld by a subtle misgiving, or rather by an intuitive desire to preserve whatever remained of their old-time comradeship. He could not hazard the withdrawal of her sympathy, or risk the loss of her approbation. Some reflections of this kind were passing through Godfrey's mind as he listened to his mother and cousin that day on the terrace.

"I can't tell where Godfrey's thoughts are of late," Gwendolen rejoined with heightened color. "He walks with his head among the stars, as the ancients did. Half the time when one addresses him one receives by way of answer an indulgent smile, as though words had played upon his understanding as sunshine does on steel, and had penetrated only as far."

"I do not deserve so classic a comparison, my dear cousin, I assure you. Yet if by holding my head so high I could read the future as the old soothsayers did, I am not sure but that I would run the risk of stumbling here below."

"Why are you so anxious to see beyond the present?" his mother asked, with her slow effort at mental concentration. "Hasn't each day a sufficient sum of joys, cares, and responsibilities? What load of premonition are you longing to lift to your shoulders? Your path in life would appear most happily defined, and all that can be required is that, following the admonition of our

motto, you 'Look to the end.' Now that Lilian and I are better," she continued, "and you freed from a burden of anxiety, you will take up the many duties, as well as social pleasures, that await you. When the days are filled with crowding plans, and the nights with society's claims, you will feel no inclination to question the stars, and the future may be trusted to take care of itself. You will be thinking of the tenants' ball soon?" she asked. "They are expecting it as usual, now that the first period of our mourning is at an end. I am sure dear Lilian will think it best for our people that all should go on as usual."

"I shall wish Godfrey to carry out every plan that his brother had formed for the welfare of his tenantry," Lilian replied, yet the words were not spoken without an effort.

"Gwendolen will be your right hand in every arrangement," said Lady Galbraith, smiling upon her niece. "Her knowledge of how to please the farmers and their families, the school-children and their teachers, the parish and the priest, is nothing short of intuition. To see her holding the tiniest child in a merry-go-round or talking of school organization with the curate, to watch her pouring tea for the old women or providing tobacco for the pensioners, would convince you that she is never more in her element than when at the head of some such function."

"An enviable adaptability, truly," answered Godfrey, laughing. "It ought to be utilized. I

could not be guilty of allowing such resources to lie fallow. When shall we begin to plan the feast, Gwen? The children come first, I suppose? Shall we walk over and consult the Rev. Wyndman as to the youngsters' capacity for buns, and ask when a prolonged fit of indigestion would be least likely to interfere with the discipline of the school?"

Gwendolen acquiesced pleasantly, and went in to get her hat.

CHAPTER XII.

Their way lay through a plantation of young larches that skirted the park on one side, while at irregular distances the growth of an older forest connected the copse, stretching all the way between the immediate domain of Bainhurst and the village of that name lying some distance beyond.

This was a familiar walk to Godfrey and his cousin. They had known every inch of the way since their earliest remembrance. It could not fail to recall some of the light-heartedness felt in childhood, when they had started together, as now, for a walk through the wood.

This was the first time the two had found themselves alone, since Godfrey's return, without the necessity for dwelling upon those grave anxieties that had recently oppressed them. But the need for such discussion might now, they realized, give place to more personal interests; and yet they both were silent.

With a long sigh that ended in a smile of content, Gwendolen took off her hat, that she might feel the full sweetness of the soft summer air. Regarding her companion, she observed that he, too, had abandoned himself to the full enjoyment of

the moment. Recent sad events evidently had no part in his memory as he kept pace beside his cousin in the narrow woodland way.

The sun, already low in the heavens, was sending long yellow shafts of light across the green expanse of park; it filtered through the lace-like foliage of the larches, falling in soft arabesque on the path before them. The only sounds audible were the busy twittering of birds making ready for their nightly rest, or now and then the quick scramble of a squirrel, or the flutter of a pheasant in the undergrowth. The scene was peaceful, reposeful, soothing; a night one might enjoy without recourse to speech; a time when Nature lays her hand upon one, softly singing all the old lullabies. For a space every care seems lifted, and we rest content upon her breast, calm, hopeful, with an infant's unquestioning repose.

At first the cousins spoke but little, and then not of themselves. There were changes for Godfrey to note; he had been seldom at Bainhurst since finishing his schooldays.

There were new plantations meantime; some of the old trees felled to make way for a more vigorous uplifting. The pheasants promised well; there would be excellent sport; they must be thinking of making up the guns. Godfrey had not consulted the gamekeepers yet, but had more than once been over to the far wood to visit Scotch Warlock. He was now too feeble to leave his lodge, but, as he had for the last fifteen years and

more, promised to be ready for the First. Like an old war-horse, he never knew when his day was done. He was as full as ever of reminiscences, and could laugh with the same chuckle of satisfaction over certain "bags" of his remembrance, as he presumably had on the days when he had assisted in making them. Had Gwendolen seen him lately? He had been asking about "the young thing with the glintin' locks."

Gwendolen smiled.

"Ah, yes; Warlock and I are fast friends. I cannot be quite positive, however, that his affection is wholly disinterested. As soon as I am fairly seated at his hearth, and all detail is exhausted as to the well-being of the various members of the family, his interest invariably settles about one topic. He remarks absently how impossible it is in our day to procure desirable tobacco. In his own words, 'The baccy nowadays is nae better'n chaff, and ha' nae mair taste than hay-seed. 'Twan't like this ance upon a time,' he avers, laying his rheumatic hand on a collapsed pouch."

"Alas! what is as it was 'once upon a time'?" rejoined Godfrey. "Poor old Warlock! We are but chorus to your oft-repeated lament. Yet to-night one is beguiled into saying that *now* is better than any vague beginning of the tale told by the fireside or lived in the light of experience. The glamour of knights and armor, of fairies and godmothers, of charms and magic spells, loses some

of its enchantment as time goes on. Yet I fancy each one of us keeps some favorite fable beginning 'Once upon a time,' that we fondly hope may end as did that of the prince and the maiden in the romance of 'Briar Rose.'"

A faint rose-tint crept into Gwendolen's cheeks as she listened. What did her cousin's words suggest? Of what was he thinking? Had she, too, her fairy-tale begun in the old, old fashion? She did not acknowledge, even to herself, that it was so, but there was something in the quiet walk with her cousin through the familiar wood that woke memories she loved to dwell upon.

"But your favorite tales were never those of sleeping beauties and enchanted kingdoms," said Gwendolen, indulging in pleasant retrospect. "Your stories all began with flashing steel and ended in bloodshed, and when there was not enough of the latter to satisfy your taste for carnage—you were singularly bloodthirsty, you remember, Godfrey—you invented harrowing situations, in which you largely figured. Coming, I remember, to the rescue of the helpless, you performed feats unknown to any belligerent save an imaginative schoolboy."

Glancing at the slight, graceful girl at his side, who, with flushed cheeks and flashing eyes, related the incidents of that time, of which she had unconsciously made the vital point, Godfrey completed the suggested picture in his own mind: she curled up on the hearthrug before the great fire that burned in the oak-panelled hall; he stretched at

full length in the warm light, listening to some older voice relating familiar tales. Those wondrous romances of childhood!—old only in time. Never worn in freshness to each generation, that marvels, and lays unknowingly the foundation of honor, sentiment, and chivalry!

"Gwen, you haven't changed one bit in all these years! You are still as fresh-hearted, as impulsive, and as trustful as a child! I have almost a mind to tell you a story, just to see your eyes grow dark and to hold you spellbound, as in the old days. Shall I?" he asked impulsively.

"Ah, do, Godfrey, tell me a story."

"Once upon a time, then, far, far away, there lived a maiden—very sweet, very gentle, very beautiful to look upon. Eyes that met one's own fearlessly, for they had never learned to be afraid; blue they were, blue like harebells, yet radiant as the sky. Hair in which the sunlight got entangled, and skin like a tinted cloud at sunrise. Her form, too, embodied all grace, for it was faultless, like a Greek model's. She appeared, perhaps, all the more beautiful by reason of her surroundings, which were sordid, ugly, prosaic, even poor. No one about her realized her beauty, although she was the only lovely thing in all their homely lives. No one regarded her growing and blossoming to attractive womanhood, because no one had time to dwell upon the gentle suggestion of her being, or to spend a thought upon anything save the daily treadmill of each day's needs. So the young girl

might as well have been chained to a rock in the open sea, with sea-birds her only companions, so far as any human sympathy touched her, or insight into her real self existed.

"One day there came to her home on this desolate island, we will call it, a young man from the outer world—a youth filled with hope and energy, with some experience and much ambition."

"A prince?" questioned Gwendolen.

"Well, a prince, if you will, for the sake of old days. A man born in a different sphere, certainly, but without the knowledge then of what that simple phrase would one day mean.

"In circumstance, condition, and present endeavors, no more than any young man who attempts to conquer a way in the world for himself, and by chance stumbles upon an unknown track. So far the life he had adopted seemed singularly devoid of human sympathy. He had almost been driven to the conclusion that the charm of woman's influence had been left behind, when he entered upon it.

"One summer's morning, when he came upon this fair-haired maiden with the marvellous blue eyes, he seemed to have snatched once more a glimpse of paradise. He intended no harm, we will say. That, too, is a part of the fireside tales.

"She was, until now, ignorant of her own imprisonment, never realizing that she was enchained; yet, when release seemed possible, she gladly welcomed a promise of change from her irksome posi-

tion. Her frank gladness and smile of welcome were not without their effect. A man is a fool to play with his own heart. He deserves all the torture brought upon himself when he yields to the allurement of a pretty face, and lays the snare for his own capture!"

"This is a fairy tale, is it not, cousin Godfrey?"

"Ah! yes, a fairy tale," replied her companion a little impatiently. "I mustn't forget that I am trying to beguile the way as we were accustomed when children. I am getting prosy, I fear; you will prefer the memory of nurse and the wonders she could relate as well sleeping as waking, for all we did when she nodded was to prod her fat chin, and on she went like a mechanical toy."

"Your story is not without interest, cousin Godfrey. I am listening with all my ears to hear the end. Whether the prince carried off his lady fair one night from the postern gate—for I am sure that she was a princess in disguise, and that there was a castle and a postern. Horses, too, tied in the shadow of great spreading yews, and dark clouds chasing one another across the pale silver moon."

"No, that is just it," Godfrey rejoined eagerly. "That is the part not analogous. I almost wish it were! There is a satisfaction sometimes in following trite paths, even to the end. But in real life—"

"In real life? You forget. You are telling me fairy tales?"

"No, I do not forget. But, Gwen, there is no use—" He had turned, and stood facing her in the narrow path. He took both her cold hands in his impulsively, as though demanding her sympathy beforehand, that he might have strength to tell her what remained of his story. She had grown quite white, but looked up into his eyes with the restrained expression of one who is trying to still a mortal pain.

"I must tell you the whole of the miserable complication. You must know all, that you may help me. You will advise—perhaps rescue me—as you used 'once upon a time.'"

His lips trembled, and she laid one of her hands over his, as a mother encourages a child to continue his confession.

"It was very lonely out there," he went on desperately. "I missed my old life more than I can tell you—more even than I knew. The days seemed cheerless, suddenly shorn of the society of women and every social interest. There were few refining influences. A man wearies after a time of the society of men; and there, where the sole topics of mutual interest centre in the farm and the weather, you can imagine how weary I grew. In consequence I indulged myself oftener, perhaps, than was wise in visits to my pretty neighbor. Milly enchanted me with her soft ways and her deprecating, confiding manner. The days went swiftly, and I realized only that we were happy together. A new light, too, seemed to dawn in her blue eyes,

and one day I knew that she loved me. I do not wish to dwell upon it. You must be tired of the story. All the rest is comprised in a few words. We became engaged to be married."

Gwendolen visibly trembled, but Godfrey was too absorbed to notice the effect his words produced.

"I did not realize that I might be doing her a wrong in this, until that day in New York when Aleck Hope spoke of my giving up my project in the West. I had never pictured such an array of circumstances. I had expected to pass all my days in America. I wished to identify myself with the country, and centre my interests there. My profession had always been a source of outlay rather than a means of support. I had determined to resign it, and to take up a more vigorons means of bettering my fortunes. I had looked forward to Bertie's long life and the succession of his son. It had never occurred to me that one day I might stand in their place, and by sheer force of circumstance be called upon suddenly to abandon my own schemes; that I would be obliged to consider everything pertaining to the future from a totally changed standpoint.

"My mother—far-seeing, almost prophetic—had used every argument to induce me to give up my interests in America and return home. She had, I now know, even appealed to Milly in order to bring about this end. What the result of that interview was I have never known. It transpired on that fateful day when we heard of the children's

death, and, as you know, my mother has never been able to bear the slightest allusion to that time of sorrow."

"But Milly?"

"That is the singular part, and almost convinces me that some promise was exacted from her that day, for, from that time to this, I have never heard from her. No word in her own handwriting, or message of any kind, has ever reached me. When I drove away from the Cross Roads that dark, cold dawn, I might as well have been driving from a closed grave, so far as receiving any sign from Milly is concerned."

"And you?"

"I have done all that man can do, save go to her; the impossibility of that you will understand. I have supplemented my letter of farewell, written that night of our departure, with others equally long, affectionate, and faithful. I have implored her to break the silence that is so inexplicable; to send a word of love or rebuke, as she will, but no longer to leave me in this state of suspense."

"My poor boy! What you must have suffered!"

Godfrey moved his shoulders with a gesture of impatience. He did not like these pitying words spoken by Gwendolen. Somehow they jarred upon him. He had indeed asked for sympathy; he had supposed this to be the object of his confession; and yet, now when he heard her even

voice, with its thrill of restrained emotion, he blamed himself for having appeared before her in the light of an anxious but neglected lover. The position was not heroic, nor one calculated to elevate him in her eyes. After all, he did not know that he cared to be commiserated by a woman!

So inconsistent are we, in the moment of our best attainment! Dropping the semi-romantic and coming back with a bound to the commonplace:

"Not exactly suffered, you know, Gwen; but there is no denying that it is deuced uncomfortable for a man not to know whether he is thrown over or not. If Milly wants to get rid of me, why doesn't she write and say so? Talk about the simplicity of a primitive people! They are as much more complicated in their way of arriving at simple ends as telegraphy exceeds ordinary letter-writing in intricacy. It is astonishing how a girl, who apparently hadn't a design deeper than the reflection of her own face in a shallow pool, can manage to keep a man on tenter-hooks for the better part of a twelvemonth!"

Gwendolen had withdrawn her hand, and again they walked on side by side. She failed to comprehend her companion's words, but her womanly nature induced her still to endeavor to aid him in understanding himself. She must not consider her position, or stoop even to think of the pain in her own sore heart. She must try, with the power of her old intuition, to establish Godfrey once more in his own self-esteem.

He was ruffled, disturbed, dissatisfied. He longed for her sisterly sympathy, and yet was impatient, as men are wont to be, of having betrayed the weakness that would exact it. She scarcely knew what he expected: to sympathize with him implied his dependence on her; to condemn the apparent heartlessness of the girl to whom he still considered himself bound would be to alienate any further confidence on his part.

The criticism that falls naturally from one's own lips one does not brook in the same spirit from another's. Gwendolen knew enough of human nature to be sure of this. She spoke gently:

"Be certain there is some explanation that will clear away all that looks so obscure and incomprehensible now, dear Godfrey. If you love Milly, nothing will keep you from fulfilling your vow to her. That you have no news may not mean indifference on her part, or neglect. When you understand the reason for what seems a strange silence, you will, perhaps, but love her the more for what she could not help. Could you not write to some one living near—some member of her own family, possibly—and ask for news of her?"

"I have not neglected that chance either," replied Godfrey. "After repeated appeals to Milly I wrote to her father, explaining my position and asking for his own or his daughter's reply. But as two months have elapsed since then I feel that I have made sufficient allowance for even Sandy's slow methods."

Speaking the name of Milly's father to the girl beside him seemed to place this memory also in an entirely new light. The association was incongruous; he wondered that he had referred to Sandy at all. He switched at the laurels that encroached upon the path with his stick, finding some vent for his impatience in the act.

"I will tell you the truth, Gwen," he said, "even at the risk of losing your sympathy. I cannot tell whether I should be glad or sorry if I could learn this minute that there had been some mistake that a word might clear away. I feel as a man might who, leading two separate and distinct existences, could from some point of neutrality dispassionately view and judge them both. As Godfrey Alleyne I loved Milly Alistair, and would have made her my wife. She was as surely a part of my plan as the sun is the light of day. But since then a change has taken place that I cannot charge altogether to outward circumstance. I do not feel that the same Godfrey exists that a few months ago bounded his horizon by the distant line of his Western farm. He would find it difficult to-day to confide his ambitions to the simple girl he intended to marry. The two lives no longer run parallel. I cannot pretend that they do. They part and diverge, until God knows whether there would be justice even in holding Milly to a bond made, one might say, in ignorance of the man."

"Does love argue, Cousin Godfrey? Can it stand apart and judge its own claims? Is there

any room left for speculation or surmise when the heart is full?"

Godfrey glanced again at the girl who spoke so gently, yet had pierced with a word the film of pretence with which he had deluded himself, and he flushed under the rebuke.

"No," he answered fearlessly, "there is not. But, Gwen, think the best of me you can. It is not for my own sake I argue. Do you not see? You always used to understand—I thought you would help me. I want to do right."

She put her hand in his in the way she used when in days gone by she was the first to make up some childish quarrel. Lifting her eyes to his, wet with tears that did not fall, she said simply, "I will help you, Godfrey."

CHAPTER XIII.

SANDY had fallen upon stony places. As he expressed it, he was "plagued half out of his senses, and couldn't tell what ter do." There was Milly grown thin and pale, "no more like the red posy she used to be than cornstalks is like fiddles." There was Hannah, more convinced of the world's depravity than ever before, and muttering anathemas both loud and deep against that portion of mankind which she indefinitely located in the "Old Country." She openly asserted that all had gone well with them up to the time when a certain representative of that vaguely-mentioned land had taken up his residence at "Sydney's." Since then "there had been the devil loose," in her own words.

She had nothing to settle with Godfrey individually, she affirmed. "He al'ays treated me better'n the folks I'm nearest kin to." Nevertheless, when her eye fell upon Milly wandering about the house or premises with listless step and spiritless expression, she was sometimes obliged to shut herself up in the wash-house for an indefinite period; but how she relieved her pent-up feelings while there has never been definitely ascertained.

Once she had boldly "tackled" Sandy as he sat on

the kitchen doorstep, while she at a little distance pursued her lightest pastime—knitting. She had been watching for this occasion for some time, prepared to give him a piece of her mind on the subject of entertaining strangers. She assumed as a basis for her dissertation that there were angels of different grades of light and degree, and that those of blackest hue might be as numerous and insinuating as any that knocked at one's door for entertainment. She proceeded witheringly to demand of Sandy, "Whar d'ye 'spect to l'arn the fust glimmer o' common sense, jest enuff to keep ye from bringin' the British inter this very door and fairly plannin' to break your own darter's heart?"

This last accusation was too much even for the long-suffering Sandy to endure in silence. He was accustomed to have many errors of judgment attributed to him without thought of justification, so far as his own personality was involved; but to be accused of planning the overthrow of his child's happiness, to be held responsible for her languid manner and sad countenance, was more than he could tolerate in silence. He ventured a remonstrance.

"Hanner," he began solemnly, "it does 'pear to me sometimes jest as if you didn't know what you was talkin' abaout. You're so used to list'nin' to your own perpetual clack, that it seems as ef you was worked by a contineral mill-stream that kep' the wheels a-movin', whether ther was any grist to grind or not. Don't chatter to me 'baout

Milly, unless you got a notion what you're sayin'. Ef you've got any receipt fer bringin' the posies back inter her cheeks, or ef you don't know how ter make her laugh without that cur'us gurgle 'way down in her throat, that sounds as much wuss than cryin' as sour milk is wuss than sweet, then I should advise you to air yer notions consarnin' our previous anchesters the British, or let 'em alone, as seems good to you. But fer the Lor' Almighty's sake, don't add to the dilemmer by tryin' to take it by both horns. 'Tain't no use. You'll get tossed as high as Haman, and come down, like as not, in a field you ain't used ter. You're a good, careful critter, Hanner, and I ain't no notion of doin' away with the character you've arned, winter and summer, for the last eighteen years. You're a good judge of horned cattle and most garden truck, but when it comes to the fine arts you ain't thar any mor'n a cow. Takes eddication to appreciate music, as I of'en told you, and mebbe it does love; music and love is somehow akin, I've al'ays tho't. 'Tain't nateral, then, that you should enter inter the feelin's of my darter—or understand," he added, with a preliminary cough against the back of his hand—"or understand the workin's of ar'stocracy."

"My sakes! Sandy Alistair, what a pesky old driveller you be! What on airth are you talking abaout, anyway? Yer must ha' gone clean outer yer head 'fore ye'd stoop to take sides with that thar young feller 'genst yer own flesh and blood!

Can't yer see that he's guv Milly the slip in a way that had ort to bring tears to yer eyes, if they isn't too seared over with sun and chaff fer any nateral moisture to permetrate?

"'Tain't nuthin'," she continued bitingly, "fer a young feller to make up to a gurl at the donation, so that every bein' who had eyes and elbers was takin' notes with the one and jabbin' with the other, every time the young people passed near 'em. 'Tain't nuthin', p'r'aps, to go orf walkin' down to the plantation that same evenin', with nobody along, less ye're willin' to count the man in the moon's company. 'Tain't nuthin' to have the knot as good as tied by the young feller's mother speakin' to Milly out 'fore the hull lot, and makin' her that notised that she couldn't ha' bin no more so with a placard hung round her neck, remarkin', 'Godfrey is my beau fer better or wuss.' 'Tain't nuthin', mebbe, for Melissa Meggs to be crocheting tidies by the harf-dozen, so fer as I know, to set 'em up with. P'r'aps ye'll say 'tain't nuthin' nuther for a gurl's beau to take hisself off outer the settlement and outer the country, they do say, and not so much as call to say 'Good-day' or 'Wish I may drop in agen,' or 'I will write to you as soon as I git thar,' or any message so fer as heerd from. That may be yer idea of sparkin' or keepin' company, for enything I know, but 'tain't mine. Y'oughter hide yer head for shame, instid of sottin' down like a ninny, and seein' that gurl fairly eat up

with frettin'. Sarve ye right ef she went off in the gallopin' consumption. Instid of hangin' round like a wet rag, y'oughter take a horsewhip and go out into the world, and run up and down till ye come across him and his ferrin mother, and then bring him back to the farm ef ye hed to lay it on every blessed step o' the way."

Hannah paused for want of breath, but the vehement click of her knitting-needles showed that this was her only reason for not proceeding.

Sandy got up and cut a small portion from a log lying near the kitchen door, which he began to whittle, leaning over with his elbows resting on his knees. He was so accustomed to listening to Hannah's hard sayings, and out of their husk extracting some kernel of mental strength, that he could not now quite escape the moral of her tirade, roughly conveyed though it was.

Was he, then, to blame, after all? Had he been judicious in inviting a young man of Godfrey's attractions to his home, placing his daughter thereby in the way of forming an unhappy attachment? Could he hold himself altogether irresponsible? He could not, indeed, have foreseen that the young Englishman would fall in love with his daughter, yet now he wondered that it had not occurred to him. As to Milly, he had thought of her still as only a child, and had never associated the idea of love or marriage with her. Besides, if she had resisted the fascinations of those well-dressed youths in distant St. Paul, how could he have foreseen

that she would fall captive to the first man in a flannel shirt and a blue neck-tie who presented himself at the farm ?

Sandy called himself "a rough old codger," and not fit for the care of his pretty daughter, but this did not solve the problem of her unhappiness, nor explain the motive of Godfrey's sudden disappearance. He said, however, changing the stick so that he whittled towards him :

"Milly's expectin' a letter from Godfrey. It's likely a letter takes consid'able time to travel from his place here."

"Pish !" sniffed Hannah. "She'll spect till the crack o' doom, in my opinion. He's made as clean tracks as a deer, and left 'baout as much dust."

Sandy really had no rejoinder for this very obvious comparison. He took refuge in pursing up his thin lips, and emitting a low plaintive suggestion of "Who will care for Mother now?" This ready resource of Sandy's always acted upon Hannah's nerves much after the manner of a red rag dangled before the eyes of a bull. She tossed her head in true bovine fashion, glanced at Sandy as though longing to impale him, muttered mendaciously in deepest baritone that "Some folks would dance at other folks' funerals," and, stepping high, left Sandy to the further fashioning of his carefully whittled stick and the continuance of his reflections.

These were not, in truth, agreeable. He could not but coincide secretly with Hannah in her esti-

mate of the probable epoch of Godfrey's expected letter. He affected an adroitly managed ignorance of the usual time occupied by a letter in process of transmission from England to Minnesota, and assumed that the important missive in question was still on the way, but he was far from owning to himself that this was the case. Without consultation with Milly, he had taken what to him seemed a most wily means to discover what was possible concerning Godfrey's whereabouts. He had called it "ridin' over to visit the pa'son," but he had really turned in the direction of Sydney's so soon as he was no longer within range of the farmhouse.

Questioning Paterson, Sandy had learned the reason for Godfrey's sudden departure, but even in that knowledge he could find no justification of his apparent neglect. "He couldn't ha' been deader if he had drownded himself in the pool," Sandy reflected; but how to reach him, or how to revive what now appeared a dead interest, was far beyond the penetration of Sandy's simple intellect.

There had often been long pauses between Godfrey's visits, and this alone would not have alarmed Milly had not communication of every kind been cut off as suddenly and absolutely as though he were in reality at the bottom of that pool her father referred to. No letter arrived from him; her own remained unnoticed. She received no word of explanation or sign of intention.

She had not seen him since before that terrible

afternoon of his mother's visit, and from this point she dated all her misfortune ; with this she connected the beginning of Godfrey's silence. What if, after all, his mother had been right, and he owed a stronger allegiance to her and his family than ever he had to his promised wife ? Perhaps, becoming convinced of the inequality of their positions, he had yielded to what must seem an inevitable decree, and had exchanged the limited prospect of their united lives for one that stretched in wider possibilities before him. Left alone with her thoughts, preserving a guarded silence on the one subject that lay nearest her heart, Milly had time to weigh all the perplexities of her short life. She had not realized before how experience lengthens days in a way not taken into account by the record of the calendar.

It was scarcely a year since she had dreamed her dream in the midst of the ripening grain, and yet sitting in the same spot now, listening to the summer breeze murmuring secrets to the nodding stalks, she seemed to herself older in heart and more worn with care than even her father could be, despite his many years.

During the first months of Godfrey's absence she had been borne up with a hope she would not yield. He would write to her, she said ; he would return—even Paterson expected this ; he had said so ; all would then be explained and everything be as before. It was like a romance in a book. She could almost have smiled when she thought of the

important part she played in its development. She wondered if any girl of her acquaintance had ever so nearly approached a heroine in fiction.

This phase, however, was but a passing one, and soon gave way to anxiety that could not be stifled, while that again was followed by alarm. Finally, as neither letter nor word came from Godfrey, these more active emotions had given place to the duller and more crushing weight of despair.

All day long she rocked herself in the corner of the verandah, where she had first met her lover, or else listlessly wandered in the little plantation, or about the uncleared tangle that grew behind the house and barns.

Once she resolved upon a very bold move indeed. She could not have resisted the impulse, though she was not, even in its conception, free from misgivings concerning its propriety.

It was some time later than her father's surreptitious visit to Sydney's that she determined upon going there quite alone. She might learn something of Godfrey, she thought, without betraying the real object of her visit. She did not intend to communicate with him, even had she the chance. She would not write again, or send so much as a message, had she the assurance that one word would bring him back to her. He had left her without farewell, and remained away without explanation. She would not exact from him what he seemed loth to give. No, he would never hear from her lips a murmur of complaint, or learn the pain of

all these long days. Young as she was, she was learning the lesson of suffering, but conning at the same time that page bound up with it—endurance.

There was no reason why she should not have out her horse, and ride alone all the way to "Sydney's," she decided. She had often been out for hours, galloping over the plains. She had not infrequently been as far as the slope quite by herself. No thought of fear and but little of propriety hampered her decision. She was accustomed to carrying out whatever plan she formed without consultation, and in perfect reliance on her own judgment.

Evading Hannah's keen eyes one morning, she mounted her pony and rode off in the direction of the open plain. Jim, having as speedily as possible reported that "Milly and the hoss was a-gallopin' like mad all the way to Jericho," got a resounding slap administered to his ear, that made him stand on one leg for some time, with his tongue thrust well out of one corner of his mouth, while in the intervals of rubbing the stinging member he ejaculated, "Lor' golly! That's a prize for lyin', you bet!"

The sudden resolve that had induced Milly to undertake a visit to "Sydney's" did not act as a sure stimulus on the way. Several times she was on the point of turning her horse's head homewards, and abandoning her design altogether. She would not attempt to learn for herself

anything about Godfrey. He had left her without farewell, and remained away without regret. Why should she betray an interest apparently unshared by him?

She reproved herself more than once for her unmaidenly boldness, but still she kept on her way. Sometimes she urged her hardy little pony to its fullest speed, as though trying to outride her own thoughts. Again, with loose rein and dejected air, she let him take his own way over the long sunny tracks, as if both horse and rider were objectless in the journey.

It was a hot day in early June. The great tract of even wheat through which she rode nowhere showed the shadowy impression of stirring air. The slight undulations in the surface were the natural ones of rising or hollowing earth. Only far away could be found any trace of bush or tree to break the monotonous green.

The sun beat upon Milly's head with unclouded glare, while from the miles of growing blades rose a faint hot breath that seemed even more oppressive than the direct rays of the sun. Milly took off her large chip hat and fanned herself. The ride was hot and wearying. She almost wished that she had not ventured, but now it was farther to retrace her steps than to go on. Looking forward to a noonday rest at the farm, and the undisturbed enjoyment of shelter and shade, she again urged the pony into a canter, and soon was within sight of her destination.

She had concluded to ask for Paterson, the overseer, and convey some message from her father, framed for the occasion by her own fertile imagination. This might lead to some remark concerning Godfrey, and so she would have adroitly obtained the object of her visit.

CHAPTER XIV.

Reining the pony before the open door, she leaned far out of the saddle, rapping with the handle of her whip upon the casement. Receiving no answer to her repeated summons, she rode around behind the house, hoping to find some place to fasten her horse. She would then be able to dismount and go in search of Paterson. The barn-doors stood invitingly open, and as that as well as the dwelling appeared deserted, she decided to take possession of the former. There could be no harm, she thought, in sheltering herself there within its cool hay-scented shade. She would unsaddle the pony, and give him time to rest before starting homewards. Slipping from her saddle, she was pulling with all her strength at the girth-buckle, when some one approaching from out the darkness said :

"Allow me, please ; you are not strong enough. That is too hard work for a woman."

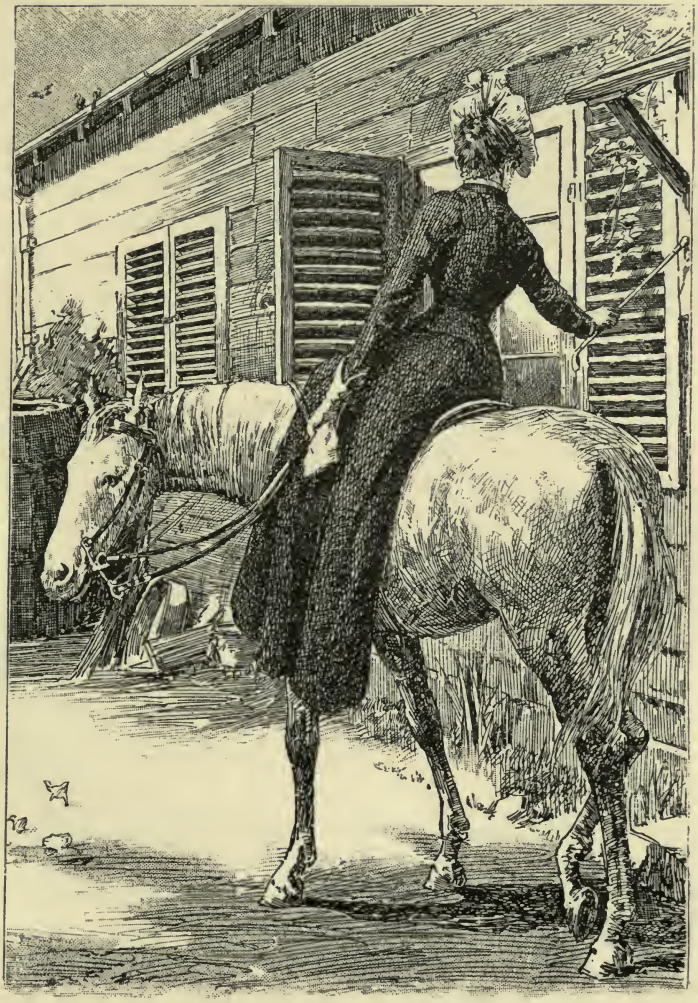
Milly started as though a rifle-shot had been discharged close to her ear. She could but dimly discern the moving figure, still blinded by the outside glare ; but the voice startled her. It had the same fulness, with deep, well-modulated intonation, that had charmed her in Godfrey's easy

speech. For a moment her heart stood still. Could he have returned as suddenly, as silently as he went away? Had he come back to remove her doubts and quiet her fears? The thought could scarcely have endured a second, for, following quickly the offer of assistance, some one took the half-unfastened buckle from her hand, and she realized at once that the voice belonged to a stranger.

He, too, was a young man, but shorter and of lighter build than Godfrey. Neither had he the same well-proportioned form and perfectly poised head. Still, he belonged to that same world, Milly thought—a gentleman, and without hesitation she pronounced him an Englishman.

The unsaddled pony was led by her companion into a roughly constructed stall, where a litter of fresh grass soon lulled him to forgetfulness of sun and heat and long shadowless tracks. Milly, with her long skirt clasped closely in one hand, still stood in the broad beam of light from the open doorway. She was attempting to frame some fitting excuse for her presence there.

She had been out riding over the plain—she often did so—she found herself on the way to "Sydney's," as they still called this farm, although it was no longer his; she had bethought herself of a message her father would like conveyed to Mr. Paterson, and had ridden over to deliver it. It was hot, very hot. She hadn't the heart to turn Wichita back without giving him a chance to



"Rapping with the handle of her whip upon the casement."

rest. She would be very grateful if she might wait there for half an hour or so, before riding back again. She would not disturb any one in any way; the gentleman need not wait; she would make herself quite comfortable.

This apparently consisted in leaning against the opposite wall, where a plenitude of loose hay and seed adhering to the rough-hewn sides shook down upon her head and skirts in a shower of dry wisps.

The young man smiled.

"Will you permit me to introduce myself, as there is unfortunately no one on hand to perform the ceremony? My name is Alexander Hope. I am a friend of Lord Galbraith's, and just now his guest, though unhappily without a host."

"Oh-h-h!" breathed Milly. She needed no further explanation. She knew well enough who Alexander Hope was, though what he meant by being a guest of Lord Galbraith's, when staying at Godfrey's, was certainly not understood by her. The explanation of his presence there seemed ambiguous.

This she did know, however, that Godfrey and Aleck Hope had been fast friends. They had been boys together at Winchester, and had afterwards "crammed" at the same tutor's for the Army "exams." Godfrey had passed, but Aleck—yes, she knew the word—had been "ploughed." They had not seen much of each other for the last few years. Godfrey had been ordered to India soon after joining his regiment, and, with the ex-

ception of a short leave of absence, had passed his time out of England. Finally returning for a longer holiday, he had conceived the idea of bettering his fortunes by this venture in the West; from this date Milly was personally familiar with his career.

What happened to Aleck after the incident that put an end to his military ambitions she did not know. What young men of his circumstances turned to in defeat she had no idea. She remembered what Godfrey had laughingly said of him: "Poor old Aleck! He thinks of resigning his place at her grace's tea-tray and coming out West to learn farming. He always did show a prophetic weakness for the plough. He's better equipped for life out here than many of us. I hope you'll meet him some day—an awfully jolly chap."

And now they had met: he with her saddle swung over his shoulder; she with wisps of hay clinging to her hair and dress. The position must have held something of the ludicrous, for, glancing across the intervening space, they both smiled.

"You look as though you knew me already," Aleck said; "but I beg pardon. I haven't, don't you know, the pleasure of your acquaintance. Would it be contrary to Western etiquette, I wonder, if you told me your name?"

"I don't know much about etiquette, I guess, but I don't mind telling you my name. I'm Millicent Alistair. My father's farm lies to the north, and is not so very many miles from here. I knew

slightly," she continued shyly, the color rising softly to her cheeks—"I had a slight acquaintance with Mr. Godfrey Alleyne."

"Perhaps you know that Mr. Godfrey Alleyne no longer exists," began Aleck. "He's—" But he stepped hastily towards the girl, who swayed miserably backwards and forwards, as though she would have fallen. Before he reached her she had indeed lost her balance, and lay with arms outspread on the hay-strewn floor.

"By Jove! This is a pretty go!" muttered Aleck. "What is a man to do with her, I'd like to know? Sunstroke without a doubt! I'd lay five to one on it for a certainty. What on earth she means by riding all over the place on a grilling day, with the mercury up among the nineties, no one but a prairie-girl would be apt to know. She's pretty — deuced pretty — prettier even than I thought, now one gets a good look at her."

He was kneeling on both knees beside her, while he fanned her vigorously with the chip hat that had fallen from her head.

"By Jove!" he ejaculated again. "I must manage to lift her up and carry her into the house. Deuced awkward — no chaperon or anything! What will Paterson say, I wonder, to see me enter from the left centre bearing the lifeless form of the ensnared heroine? I don't mind the audience stepping out, under the circumstances. But how to manage it? She must weigh nine stone if she does an ounce. I wonder how I'll get hold of her?

I say, Miss Alistair! I beg pardon; but if you don't mind—"

By this time Milly opened her eyes languidly. Finding the stranger with both arms about her, and her face in a proximity to his closely-cut brown beard that a few moments before she would have found difficulty in imagining, she gave a convulsive little shriek and clasped both her hands tightly over her face. Aleck quickly withdrew, leaving Milly dependent on her own vertebræ, as she still sat in a half-collapsed condition on the floor.

"Do you often faint?" he asked sympathetically; but receiving only an indistinct gurgle by way of response, he went on: "It must have been the heat, for just as I was going to tell you some pleasant news about Godfrey you up and fainted away."

Milly withdrew her hands. Pleasant news about Godfrey! Hadn't he just said he did not exist? That was far from pleasant. He must exist! What a tiresome man! What did he mean by frightening one to death, and then declaring that his news was pleasant? He must be "queer." *She* overcome by the heat! *He* must have had a first-class sunstroke, and never recovered. She believed he was demented to announce he had pleasant news, and embody it in such puzzling form. She began fairly to hate him. Why didn't he cease the even stroking of that ridiculous brown moustache, and speak?

"Well?" she said laconically.

"I beg pardon—ah—yes! I was going to tell you how your old friend—"

"Who told you that he was my old friend?" she asked petulantly.

"I only judged so, knowing him, you see, and your being near neighbors, and young, and all that. Godfrey is such a good fellow, and handsome, all the women say; I imagined there might be an affinity, I think they call it, between natures that seem alike."

"You are assuming more than you have a right to express, Mr. Alexander Hope." Milly rose to her feet with dignity.

Aleck picked the saddle up off the floor, and hung it on a nail. He had presumed, he was aware, and ejaculated mentally that he would find satisfaction by kicking himself around the barn. The girl might be unused to the conventional forms of society, but she certainly had a ready intuition that recognized a man as a cad when he appeared like one.

"Miss Alistair," he began gravely, "I beg your pardon most sincerely for assuming anything."

He looked at her frankly, as if waiting for her to speak.

Meeting his apology half-way, Milly said gently,

"My father will be glad of any good news you have to tell us of Mr. Alleyne. He was a great friend of his; he misses him very much."

"It isn't likely that he will come back here again—more's the pity," replied Aleck. "You

see, since he became Lord Galbraith he is needed at home." Milly gasped. This was indeed unlooked for. "It is a very rich title indeed. The estates, both Scotch and English, will require all of Godfrey's time, I am thinking. His experience out here must already seem like a dream to him. He is not a politician, and may not go in for that sort of thing, as his brother did; but he intends, so I understand, to improve the property, do a lot of building, and carry out no end of Utopian schemes for the tenantry. He intends to make himself into a model landlord, reduce the rents, and beggar himself in the end, I am inclined to think. Plans of this sort look well enough on paper, and, too, sound advanced and humanitarian. They are, indeed, expected now of a young man coming into his property, but when they come to be put into practice it isn't so easy. There are a legion of prejudices and an army of opposition to overcome. The very tenants themselves are one's natural obstacle to all measures of reform. They prefer damp floors and smoky chimneys; they hug leaky roofs and reject sanitary drainage; they decline modern inventions and labor-saving implements; they demand their ancient rights in rheumatism and consumption, and ask plaintively, 'Are you not contented with improving your own homes, and adding luxury to luxury, while you leave us in peaceful possession of inherited discomfort?'

"Godfrey is a man who will try to put in prac-

tice the advanced theories of the times. He has lived long enough in America to become imbued with the principle of an equality of interests, and he will attempt to transplant the idea among his own people. He will implant in those sturdy old Scotch farmers a love of experiment that will doubtless paralyze their industry for the next ten years. He will preach the dignity of individual labor and personal responsibility in his English domains until every mother's son among his tenantry will clamor for a reduction in rent and an advance in wages. Rich experimentalists are acting upon advanced civilization much as an overamount of leaven affects dough. It fizzes and rises and makes a most promising display, but when one comes to test the loaf it is often too light, the sweetness evaporated, and the taste unpalatable."

Milly listened, but certainly had grasped very little of her companion's meaning, yet the drift was borne in upon her in a way she could not resist.

She understood that the time had come when Godfrey was no longer the Godfrey she had known, the man with few cares and limited responsibilities. He no longer belonged to this country—her own country—of dawning possibilities and experimental policy. He was no longer at liberty to throw in his fortunes with a new Republic; he could never be claimed again as an adopted American. He belonged by obligation, as he did by birth, to a distant land, the land of his fathers

and the inheritance of his blood. He must fulfil the destiny of a preordained order of things. He was now the head of his family, and as absolutely cut off from his short experience in the New World as though he had been translated to another planet.

She might have known how it would be from the beginning. She was a silly little fool to have imagined she could take the place in his heart that one might who was of his own sphere. What did she know of inherited titles and vast estates, or how should she comprehend the power of wealth and position? Of what consequence was she? Whom had she ever influenced, either in theory or by example? No one, not even Jim, cared what she thought on matters of home policy, and who, beyond the limits of her father's farm, concerned themselves about her in any degree? She was as far removed from a position of influence, either at home or abroad, as that fly crawling on the wall. She was in no wise fitted to become the wife of a man born to a rank and duties which she hardly comprehended. He had gone back to them, she knew, and to this severance she must submit; and yet how her heart cried, "Ah, Godfrey! you were mine then! Only a few bright days, my beloved, but they were all my own. Thank God, I did not believe then that you could leave me! I should never have known how bright the world was had you not come to me; but ah, the darkness! the night! This is the worst!"

The man watching her thought, "What an uncommonly expressive face this young country girl has! One could believe that she was now entering into the whole future of Galbraith, so changing is the sympathetic light that comes and goes in her blue eyes." When one took into account, too, the wisps of hay and the dusty gown, she really did preserve an uncommon amount of dignity. He concluded he would continue the theme that called forth so varying a play of expression.

"That will be a very suitable marriage," he began again, "the one Godfrey is to make with his cousin."

Milly tightened her clasp upon her riding-skirt, but she only looked her inquiry.

"He is going to be married soon, they say. Indeed, he has been engaged to her for years; a boy and girl love-match, I have heard. There can't be any reason for delaying the wedding, so soon as the suitable time for mourning and all that has elapsed."

"No, there can't be," repeated Milly.

"The announcement of their engagement has appeared in the *Morning Post*, I see, and after that there is no appeal, you know."

"I should think not;" but what this authority was that could so dispose of the man she loved, and who had promised to make her his wife, she had not the most remote idea.

"They have both been first favorites in the

fashionable world, and their wedding is sure to be the first affair of the year."

"Yes, sure to be," echoed Milly. She rose presently, and said she would go out into the air. She would feel better; the heat was intense and the barn stuffy; and, besides, she wanted to find Mr. Paterson. She had a message for him.

Her companion offered to send for the overseer, begging her to rest in the house and let him offer her refreshment of some kind, but Milly declined. She could not trust herself any longer to maintain an outward show of calmness. Her heart was sore, and she must have time to master its dull throbbing. She thanked Aleck, but went out by herself into the brilliant sunlight. She scarcely saw where she was going; the light blinded her, and a dull sense of having come to the end of all things benumbed her brain and deadened her senses. She was saying, over and over, as she went, "Ah, Godfrey, I have loved you so! No one can ever love you as I have! It is such agony to give you up!"

Passing the house, she had entered a long lane cut by passing teams and farm-implements between the walls of growing grain. Soon she felt herself as much alone as though she had cut adrift from shore on a vast lake. She threw herself down amidst the green, and sobbed as though her heart was breaking.

But we all know of what tough fibre this organ of life is made. It neither breaks nor dies, even when strained to bursting. No shock can snap

its strings, nor sorrow wear out its tissues. Physical being rarely gives way at the touch of grief. And so, although Milly many times said that she should die, she did not. After a time she sat up, wiped the tears from her flushed face, and decided that she would go home.

She started to go directly back to the barn where the pony was stabled, hoping to escape any further encounter with Aleck. She was not disappointed, for she met no one on the way, nor was her host any longer in possession of the barn. Hastily saddling her pony, she mounted and rode away, quite forgetting the intended message for Mr. Paterson.

CHAPTER XV.

A DAY in early September had been chosen as the one on which Godfrey should publicly enter upon his duties as lord of the domain. A soft autumn day, when the air seemed filled with the sweetness of lingering summer, yet over all hung that peculiar tissue of atmosphere that defines the difference between the two seasons.

Since early morning there had been unusual stir and life among the inmates of Bainhurst, for all had their part to perform in the preparations for the day's events; all, indeed, except the Dowager Lady Galbraith. Sitting on the terrace in the open sunlight, she watched the moving figures hurrying to and fro, and pictured other days. Vainly she strove to form and regulate the thoughts that arose in her slow-moving brain. Days of like import passed before her, and often in the confusion of crowding memories she failed to recall who it was that to-day would be acknowledged by his people as Lord of Galbraith. Sometimes it was the husband of her youth; again, it was her first-born in all the strength of his young manhood; then, catching glimpses of Godfrey as he came and went, giving directions or aiding with his own hands,

the memories faded, until nothing was left but the interest which centred in him.

Tents, gay with many-colored flags, dotted the expanse of park and stood out gaily amid dark trunks of giant trees. A herd of deer, startled by unwonted sounds and the hurrying of busy feet, had retired to a distant knoll, where they stood huddled in the shadow of a group of firs. Liveried servants, with powdered heads and dignified gait, carried from house to tent heavy silver trays piled high with dainties. Flags were flying from the towers, and adorned every vantage-point on turret or tent-peak. Multi-colored lamps hung like gaudy blossoms on the trees, while the gray outline of the ancient dwelling had been followed in many tinted balls that in the evening would each hold its cup of light, making the whole pile to shine like some palace of Aladdin.

Over the entrance to the largest marquee a shield hung which bore, cunningly fashioned in flowers, the motto of the family. This had been the especial work of Gwendolen's deft fingers. Lady Galbraith, observing her son and niece striving with amateur skill to fasten the heavy device to the yielding surface of the tent, was moved to ejaculate indefinitely, "Thank God for all His blessings!" but the smile of content that hovered about her lips was called there by one reflection only.

Presently the gay uniform of the Yeomanry band was added to the scene; and, following soon, the

first straggling arrivals of guests began to appear. From out the vista of a green-arched lane trooped gay groups of children, marshalled by the schoolmistress, proud in the consciousness of holiday attire as well as of the important part they were to play in the day's celebration.

White frocks for the little maids, a broad expanse of spotless collar for their brothers, were the indispensable adjuncts of attire; but a nosegay made up of those showy blossoms that seem to be the especial product of every cottage garden was a no less essential adornment for the occasion. With posies tightly grasped in pudgy fingers, and with hearts aflame with anticipation and excitement, they trudged in to the enlivening strains of "Come, lads and lassies!"

Then by twos and threes, and sometimes in families of incredible numbers, streamed in the older folk, all in Sunday array, and most of them extremely restrained and stiff in consequence.

One of the marvels one never ceases to wonder at is how soap and water, with a change of raiment, can so obliterate every indication of character and individuality from the sturdy deep-lined countenances of those who labor in humble occupations. Behind the plough in his blue jean blouse, or over the anvil with his sleeves rolled up, there appear lineaments that betoken strength, purpose, reflection, individual characteristics; but uniformed in the ill-fitting black of holiday broadcloth, with shaven chin and well-soaped locks, we lose all

recognition of our old friends. Women, perhaps, are not so profoundly influenced by change of any kind; or else feminine character, being more complex and many-sided, more readily adapts itself to new conditions; for the shawl used only on great days or the bonnet reserved for holidays is assumed on these occasions more gracefully than are the Sunday habiliments of their lords and masters.

But guests were arriving rapidly from all the country round. Carriages drew up in the Long Drive, conveying gay parties of young people from neighboring houses. Everywhere the grounds seemed alive with merry faces, and the air resounded with ringing voices. And everywhere Godfrey could be seen among his guests; while from group to group Gwendolen moved with that grace and unconsciousness of self that distinguished whatever she did.

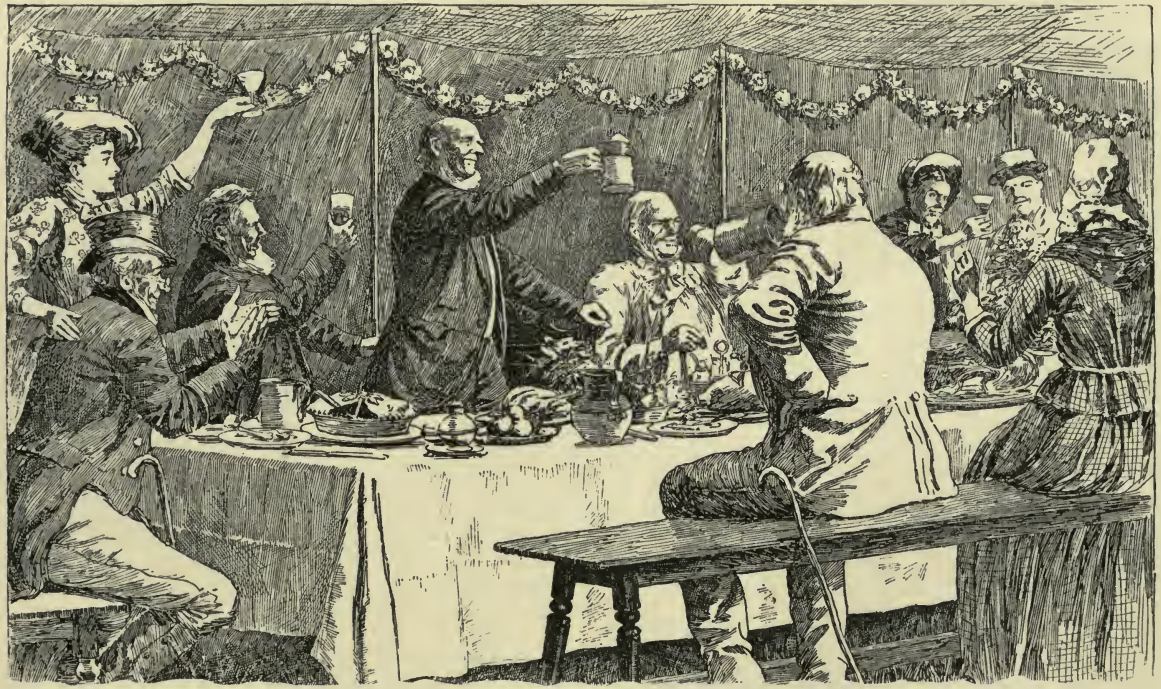
Not a child was there who did not carry home a memory of some bright word or smile, for she had a rare faculty of adaptation to even the least of them. She knew all the games the little ones most delighted in, and how to start them in merriest mood; she understood, too, how a word spoken in time could restrain the more boisterous gaiety of the older children. They all loved her, and the highest praise they asked was a word of commendation from her lips.

The feast, the children declared, was a grand success. Never since the world began had there been such buns! Never in like time had tea

flowed with such abundance, or so many sugar lumps been added to render it delectable! Lemonade must have spouted from an inexhaustible fountain; and as to cakes and lollipops, there was no end! It was a glorious feast! They only wished M'lord would live to see countless days such as this; and as to Miss Gwendolen—why, they could not think of anything good enough to wish her, but they offered to share with her all their sweets and goodies.

Marshalled again by the tireless schoolmistress, they were finally marched away, to enjoy again in their dreams a feast of giant buns swimming in a sea of tea.

Then it was that the older men and women drew together in anticipation of the greater event of the day—the dinner. This was to be served in the great marquee, and "Scotch Warlock," as his neighbors called him, had been elected to preside. Not, surely, from any especial fitness for the position, unless, indeed, the supreme merit of superior years could be called so. However, it was agreed that no one among them could more worthily fill the place. Once more, with quavering voice and abundant detail, he recounted the glories of every past entertainment of like kind in which he had taken part since the time when the young "laird's" grandfather had patted his curly pate, saying, "When, now, wilt thou grow to match thy name?" This was the old gamekeeper's favorite tale, and had borne the wear of many years' repetition.



"'*Neebors,' he said, 'ane glass is as guid as twa when man and maid may be pledged thegither.'*"

Never had it failed to secure those evidences of approval dear to his heart. It was as surely counted upon as a part of the day's ceremony as was the proposal of my lord's health. To-day, however, the old gamekeeper was bound to add one more to the numerous anecdotes already connected with his long years on the estate. He had risen on trembling legs, and, with shaking hand uplifted, was about to propose that toast which would loosen all tongues, and set the sturdy farmers and their dames on easy footing with their neighbors, when a glimpse of Gwendolen moving about among the people suggested some new impulse to his senile understanding.

"Neebors," he said, "ane glass is as guid as twa when man and maid may be pledged thegither. In drinkin' to Maister Godfrey (Lord preserve's! how my old brain is a-gaen dottie! his lairdship's my meanin'), let's nae forget the glint of our bonny leddy's locks or the flash of her blue een, for they're like sun atop of bluebells, or like stars in the purple pool in Ayr. There's naebody in all the country round to compare with our bonny leddy, and who cuid make his lairdship sae blithe a bride! Fill to the brim, neebors all, for we pledge lang life and sunny days to his lairdship, the tenth Earl of Galbraith, and may he long bide 'lang side his douce leddy, fair Miss Gwendolen!"

Cheers rang out with added fervor since now it was publicly announced that coupled with the

young lord's name might be that of his cousin. What more fitting time to demonstrate their hearty goodwill? And so the lusty farmers added cheer to cheer, shouting themselves hoarse, and drank no end of good wine and beer. Old Warlock was certainly not in his prime, they all acknowledged, nor could he always distinguish between one neighbor and another; but in a matter so important as this was it likely that he would err? Indeed, he but expressed what every man, woman, and child on the estate had settled long ago in their own minds: this wedding of their new lord to his favorite cousin. Was it not of all things the most natural and to be desired? Indeed, my Lady Gwendolen had grown up in their midst, and could call each one of them by name down to the tiniest tot at his mother's knee. What stranger could ever do so much, or in any way fill her place? No one, surely, that had ever come among them; but now it was past doubting that "my lady" would remain as the young lord's bride, and this was joy enough. And so they once more broke out into open congratulation.

If Godfrey had himself prompted the old gamekeeper's speech, he could not have suggested anything that would so have bound the hearts of his tenants to him as did this unexpected announcement.

But Gwendolen? As Godfrey rose to reply amid a deafening uproar of good wishes he scarcely dared look for her in the little throng around the

door. When he did, however, gain courage to glance that way, he was relieved to find that she had slipped away, sparing him the embarrassment of speaking before her.

Whatever ambiguity his reply assumed, it must, at least, have well answered the purpose; for when his guests arose after repeated "three times three" in his honor, not one of them could have told whether "milord" and "my Lady Gwendolen" were to go on for ever in the pleasant relationship of affectionate cousins, or were to assume the nearer one suggested by old Warlock. However it was, they all voted this a memorable occasion, and each departed, holding a high estimate of himself and in a mellow friendliness with mankind in general.

Before the day ended, Gwendolen was destined to be once more reminded of the old gamekeeper's blundering goodwill. Some of the guests from neighboring houses, remaining after the afternoon fêtes were at an end, were to make a part of the dinner-party invited by the Dowager Lady Galbraith in honor of her son. Afterwards there would be dancing and the other evening amusements attendant on such entertainments.

Just before the guests were to assemble in the drawing-room, Gwendolen bethought herself of an order that needed changing concerning the lighting of the conservatories. Not waiting to send her message by a servant, she ran hastily down the stairs, and found herself on the point of interrupt-

ing what appeared to be an interesting *tête-à-tête* between two of the guests, already in possession of the conservatory she was about to invade. Mrs. Laughton-Seabury had evidently been the speaker, while her companion, Captain Cathay, threw in those interjectional comments which, in a certain phase of society, seem to answer all the purpose of an interesting colloquy. One of these Gwendolen caught.

"I didn't know before that it was announced," he was saying.

"It is one of those cases when words could scarcely make a fact plainer, I should think. Every one knows that Lord Galbraith's mother has brought her up with the one expectation before her. Indeed, the Dowager has set her heart on it."

Gwendolen fled without so much as bestowing a thought upon the lamps, that were likely to go out in darkness long before the hour when their brilliance would be required. Flying along the passage-way, she regained her room in time to cool her flushed face before encountering the comments of Mrs. Laughton-Seabury or the scrutiny of her companion.

What did it mean—this conspiracy to thrust upon her a possibility that might, indeed, suggest itself to those who saw only the outside, but that to her was beyond the reach of contemplation even in the recesses of her own brain? Her cheeks burned, and, without knowing why, hot tears rose to her eyes. She dashed them away, impatient

that the chance words she had overheard could so disturb her. She had other things to think about besides idle gossipings not intended for her ear.

Glancing in the mirror before which she stood, to make sure that no traces of agitation were visible in her tell-tale face, she saw only luminous eyes that shone with an added light, like the hidden gleam of blue sapphires; a well-poised head crowned with soft rings of sunlit hair; a milk-white throat and perfect arms; a lithe, well-proportioned form, that in its softly-draped gown of dense white suggested those sculptured ones we sometimes name as models of perfection. Whether what the glass reflected restored her calm reliance upon herself or no, it would be difficult to say; but, at all events, a few minutes later she entered the drawing-room with all her quiet self-possession restored. Even Mrs. Laughton-Seabury would have found difficulty in again ruffling that reposeful manner.

CHAPTER XVI.

With some temperaments the act of confession seems to imply a certainty of absolution. Casting the burden of our fault upon another, we calmly enter upon the enjoyment of that peace which ought to wait upon expiation. The confessor becomes the penitent; while, lightened of our load, we gladly assume the ease of innocence. Something of this kind occurred in Godfrey's case: having eased his heart of the burden that had become to him so heavy, he straightway seemed to forget that he ever had borne its weight. Indeed, had this confidence been a tangible load, visible to mortal sight, one could have believed that he had transferred it bodily to his cousin's shoulders. In proportion as he grew lighter of heart by reason of his confession, Gwendolen appeared cast down by its weight.

She had never tried to define her feelings towards Godfrey, but now, for the first time, she realized that an underlying thought of him, perhaps an indefinite hope, had colored all her dreams of the future. Possibly she would even now have denied that she loved him with more than a cousin's natural affection, yet the dull sense of loss that followed the acute pain Godfrey's story had caused

was not to be easily stifled ; by means of it she had better learned to understand herself. This knowledge was not without compensating features. Since their walk through the larches, that indefinable something which had stood between them had vanished, leaving the old bond of entire confidence. Whether Gwendolen was the gainer thereby admitted of doubt, but, at all events, Godfrey seemed to thoroughly rejoice in the renewal of their old relations.

Gwendolen was not one who could enter into a compact of any nature without some definite intention. When she had answered Godfrey's appeal with a promise, she had indeed foreseen a struggle with her own heart ; but were it to be crushed she would still endeavor faithfully to secure her cousin's welfare, and, she added, the happiness of the woman he loved. She repeated these words often, as though trying to accustom herself to a new and difficult formula.

It seemed strange to her that she had never anticipated so natural a position. Many young men marry ; most of them love at some time or other—few certainly reach Godfrey's age without experiencing a romantic attachment of some nature. Why should she not have looked forward to this same experience in his case?

But as these questions brought no sătisfactory replies, she apparently asked them only for the purpose of inflicting pain upon herself. One was reminded of a penitent still beating himself with

knotted cord long after his penance was at an end, merely for the sake of proving what human nature could endure.

Seated one day in her own bright morning-room, she was asking herself, for the fortieth time, the same goading questions that always baffled her. How was she to help Godfrey? How was she to redeem her promise? What could she do towards the unravelling of that mystery which now shut out his happiness? She had even got so far in her reflections as the consideration of a possible visit to Milly in person, and was planning an imaginary conversation in which she would prove Godfrey's loyalty, and suggest Milly's return to him under her own sheltering wing, when her thoughts met with an unusual interruption by reason of the entrance of her aunt.

Lady Galbraith came forward slowly, leaning on her crutch-stick, showing little of her old vigor either in face or form.

"Ah, what an unexpected pleasure, dear aunt! Your visits have of late been as few as angels', and I am sure no angel could be more welcome!" exclaimed Gwendolen, hastening to assist her aunt to an easy-chair in a cosy corner. "Now we shall have one of our old-fashioned mornings together. First, I shall make you comfortable with pillows and a footstool, and then I shall read aloud one of your favorite books. Shall I, auntie dear?"

"You are very unselfish, my dear, and I am always glad to hear your sweet voice; but I have

come to have a little talk with you, my Gwendolen," Lady Galbraith answered. "I have been thinking that it is not wise to put off any longer whatever is left for me to do. A strange uncertainty surrounds me, and gives warning that soon I may not be able to speak as I now do. Some days I can feel the numbness creeping even to my brain, and there may come one when it will never depart again. When that time comes my children must not weep for me. On the whole, I shall have few regrets."

"Why do you dwell upon such remote possibilities?" asked Gwendolen, kneeling beside her. "You are much stronger lately; see what a walk you have taken to come to my room! I shall not let you dwell on gruesome things. Besides, who can tell when any one's time may come? The youngest of us may be called to go first, you know, dear."

"I hope not. Certainly not you or Godfrey. You are young, and have everything before you. I am planning for you a long lifetime of joy together."

"I hope Godfrey will know only happiness, wherever his life is passed."

Lady Galbraith regarded her niece questioningly.

"I must speak of what I mean more definitely, Gwendolen. It will not be a new thought that I am confiding to you, but the dearest wish of my heart. Since you came to me a helpless infant, deprived of both father's and mother's love even

before you felt their need, you have been to me like a beloved daughter. Nearest to Godfrey in years of any of my children, you grew up with him in closest sympathy. Through all the years of your childhood, schooldays, and later life I have kept the hope green in my heart that one day I should see you my son's wife.

"Perhaps you will think that such a suggestion should not come first from me—that Godfrey should be the one to open the door of his heart and show you what is treasured therein. You may say that I am a doting old woman, and past the knowledge of young hearts; that I haven't the right to speak in my son's name. But if you knew all, you would conclude differently."

Lady Galbraith straightened herself in her chair, with some of the old fire animating her usually immobile features. This subject was to her like the sound of a bugle to an old war-horse; she roused to a temporary belief in her own power.

"There are reasons, which it may not be well to dwell upon, that render Godfrey singularly doubtful of his position towards you; he hesitates, not knowing how you might receive a proposal of marriage from him. It is not worth while to define these reasons; they have nothing to do with the present. Men oftentimes are influenced by circumstances that we would find difficulty in understanding even if explained. If for a time Godfrey fell away from us, and embraced a life foreign to every instinct of his nature, it does not follow

that he has not returned more than ever desirous of spending the rest of it in your service."

"O aunt," began Gwendolen in real distress, "please do not think of this—you cannot know of what you are speaking. Godfrey would be pained beyond measure did he know of your proposal. Do not, I beg, suggest such a possibility to him. He has many plans and other intentions. You will not think me unmindful of your love in desiring this, but, dear aunt, don't you see it can never be?"

"I am the best judge of what is well for my son, my child. I know more of his life and intentions than perhaps you are aware. He has passed those youthful days when indiscretion may be pardoned by reason of immaturity. He has arrived at that time of life when he must take upon him its cares and responsibilities. To meet these worthily, he requires the influence of home and the love of a true woman. He should marry. Through a singular fatality he has attained a position his wife might well be proud to share. But this is not all: he has much besides worldly possessions to offer her. Perhaps it is not fitting for an over-fond mother to dwell upon those qualities of mind and heart that render him attractive. To you at least there is no need of their repetition. His surely is not a cause to be pleaded in vain."

Gwendolen sank upon the floor at her aunt's feet, her fingers interlaced about her knees, her head drooping.

This was an agony she might have been spared, she thought.

It was enough to do battle with her own heart without this struggle from without. Each word her aunt spoke felt like the stab of a sharp knife, and yet how could she end the pain? Her aunt either was ignorant of her son's engagement to the young girl he had left in Minnesota, or else she considered that his new life so estranged him from that of which Milly had been a part as to practically annul all past obligations. She could not tell how much of Godfrey's confidence had been given his mother, or what ground she had for considering her son free. She knew that he was not free. He was bound by every sense of honor to fulfil the vow made to the innocent girl who believed in him. So far there was no sterner barrier between them than that of silence, and this, which might be traced to accident merely, was surely not a sufficient excuse for either distrust or indifference. If he loved her, and had promised to make her his wife, there was but one way. Gwendolen's ethical laws were of the simplest construction, and to her mind bore but one interpretation. Her aunt's proposal was as far removed from consideration as though she had already heard the irrevocable vows of the Church interchanged between Godfrey and Milly. He belonged to Milly by all the right of a solemn engagement, and it would not be Gwendolen's part—the part of one who loved him—to counsel her rejection. She did not believe him capable of such

dishonor. Whatever his feelings now were—and she thought she had heard more than the mere words of his broken confession—still she realized that no measure of content existed in the denial of his obligation. In her mind's vision she still beheld him as he had appeared that night, and the remembrance gave her strength.

Kneeling again beside her aunt, she took her thin lifeless hands between her own warm young ones.

"Dear aunt," she said, "you will let me be to you as a daughter, just as it has ever been. I shall never leave you if you will let me stay. I shall minister to you always with a child's fond affection. I love to feel that I am necessary to you; that you think my place would be hard to fill. It is all dear as the breath of life to me. You will not send me away! Godfrey, too," she said with an effort, "is like a beloved brother. I only ask a sister's place at his side. Let us think of other things. The time will come when Godfrey will marry, and I"—with a sad attempt at a smile—"well, I shall be the old-maid aunt who spoils his children."

"The idea is ridiculous—preposterous!" exclaimed Lady Galbraith, with all her old vehemence. "What madness can prompt you to thus thwart my most cherished wishes? What are the bonds of family, the ties of affection, if they carry with them no obligation? Must the whim of the moment outweigh every unselfish consideration?

You are deliberately ruining your own life and his, through some misconception. Why will you be so blind? Cannot you see what is apparent to many besides myself, that Godfrey loves you?"

Lady Galbraith's face was bloodless, and she spoke with labored effort. Gwendolen remembered the warning of the doctors—that any unnatural excitement might cost her aunt's life. Yet now she saw her roused to a pitch of irritability not easily soothed.

Taking her aunt's hand, she said quietly:

"Forgive me, aunt, if I seem unfeeling or obstinate. I know that I owe everything to you, and would willingly obey you in all things did the command only affect me; but the happiness of others is at stake. You surely would be the last one to counsel an injustice. Let us try to forget all that you have urged, and once more go on comfortably as before. Come, let me begin by wheeling up the sofa and tucking you up in front of the fire while I read to you."

But Lady Galbraith was not inclined for a cosy morning. For once she preferred the solitude of her own room to the society of her favorite niece. She got up feebly, accepting the offer of Gwendolen's arm, and said she believed she would return to her own room.

CHAPTER XVII.

The remainder of the day dragged wearily. It seemed to Gwendolen that weeks instead of hours made up its length. For the last few days Godfrey had been absent from Bainhurst, called away by the exigency of some business detail. Following this short visit would be one of longer duration, as he intended to join his brothers, who had already preceded him to one of his estates in Ayrshire.

It had been at first arranged that the Dowager Lady Galbraith, with Gwendolen, should join the party there, but the former's continued helplessness rendered the journey a serious undertaking, and it had for this reason been finally abandoned. Lilian, too, was away, and so Gwendolen found herself practically alone, and thrown on her own resources for occupation and amusement.

After her aunt's visit that morning she experienced some difficulty in settling to any of the usual home employments. She tried her embroidery, but found no pleasure in tracing its intricacies; she attempted reading, but found that to be no less irritating; she took up her pen with the thought of a profitable morning spent over her correspondence, but soon threw it down, proving

this effort as dull and lifeless as the others that had failed. She had never been so dissatisfied with herself or more inclined to deal harshly with her own shortcomings. This was a condition of mind so new in her even existence as to be wholly misunderstood, and therefore met with no excuse or compromise at her hands. Gentle in her dealing with others' failings, Gwendolen acknowledged no palliation for her own, and in consequence her expiations were self-imposed and severe. Struggling thus with a succession of varying moods, the day at length passed.

Finally, after a solitary dinner, which her aunt had been unable to share, Gwendolen, still revolving the problems her aunt's words had suggested, found herself seeking the relief that physical activity sometimes secures. Up and down the terrace her firm young steps carried her, and with every turn a better understanding, even the promise of hope, renewed itself within her.

The night was clear, with wide distances showing between the stars, but with the light of a full moon softening every outline of the view. Its exquisite glory wrought at last a change in Gwendolen's perturbed being. Stopping now and then in her walk whilst she leaned against the coping of an ancient balustrade, she drank in all the calming influence of the peaceful scene. An irresistible longing for a closer communion with the spirit that brooded over the night caused her to gather up the folds of her long evening dress,

while she ran with light step in the direction of the stables. Meeting one of the grooms on the way, she gave an order for her horse to be saddled and brought to a door she indicated, where presently she would appear ready equipped for a ride.

Changing her dress quickly, she was waiting at the place designated by the time the horse was led from the stable. Springing upon his back, she dismissed the groom, saying she would not require his attendance, as she should scarcely go beyond sight of the house.

This, indeed, was her first intention, but before she had more than once made the circuit of the larch wood she had forgotten the hour and whatever impropriety there might be in a more extended ride through the moonlit night. Turning into a narrow lane that seemed almost dark in comparison with the open spaces of the park, she came out upon a wide tongue of open land that stretched high above a miniature plain lying many feet below.

The view from the furthest point was extended and at all times attractive, but to-night, touched with the same softened radiance that lay over all the land, it seemed particularly beautiful. Cantering her horse to the very edge of the precipitous cliff, Gwendolen soon was lost to every sensation save the enjoyment of what lay before her.

Near at hand the light fell full and intense, revealing every leaf on tree and bush in distinct outline. Duplicated in shadow, they lay again

across the greensward, showing in dark well-defined shapes on the level space. The horse and rider, too, stood out against the illuminated background like a single clearly-cut silhouette. Far below, the little plain lay in purple shadow, that again melted to a fringe of olive, where borders of willows lined the turbid stream flowing through. This, too, merged and was lost in a flashing silver channel that met the waters of a greater deep somewhere far out on the horizon. Across the channel arose the irregular outline of distant hills; they, too, shaded by the evening light, appeared only like faintly tinted clouds rising from out the water.

Athwart the path of moonlight that cleft the waters of the channel every now and then a white sail dipped like the wing of some great seagull. Then, again failing to catch the light on outspread canvas, the boat vanished as mystically as it had appeared, engulfed by shadows.

The silence, the wide expanse of view, the absolute repose that surrounded her, even the solitariness of her position, all exerted upon Gwendolen their healing power. The perplexities of the day were for the moment forgotten, or, at least, lost some of their harassing importunity. Temptation, too, the subtlest of all her assailants, ceased to whisper, cast behind by the influence of a serener consciousness. She felt lifted out of herself, and longed with all her soul that she might continue in the spirit which had stolen upon her.

So absorbed had she become that another horse and rider had emerged from the green arched lane and were almost at her side before she observed their approach. Startled by the sound of horse's hoofs beating their way over the moist turf, she realized her loneliness far removed from human aid, no matter what befell. She almost repented of her adventure, and wished at least that Myles, the groom, were near. Indeed, in the approaching rider she hoped she might recognize him come in search of her. Nevertheless she scarcely dared put the question to the test by facing the horseman. Gathering up the bridle, however, in her trembling fingers, she decided upon a hasty retreat, but before she could turn her horse's head she had realized who it was that reined his horse beside her.

Recognizing Godfrey, a sense of infinite relief overpowered every other sensation. She even forgot to wonder at his fortunate appearance at the very moment when she had supposed him many miles away.

"O Godfrey ! I am so glad it is you ! You have no idea of the terrors I underwent in the moment before I recognzied you !" she exclaimed. "You see I had no idea at first of coming so far, and wouldn't let Myles accompany me; but the night was so charming and Colin so enticing that before I was aware I found myself on the way here. I couldn't turn back then without seeing 'the road to heaven,' as we used to call the moonlight lying across the water. Do you remember?"

"Yes, I remember," repeated Godfrey a little crossly. "But do you know, Gwen, you have given me the worst fright I ever had in all my life! I don't mind confessing that that last quarter of a mile was by far the longest I have ever travelled. Hearing you were out on Colin, I supposed I should overtake you somewhere within the bridle-paths near the house; but when you were not to be found in them I followed on, knowing your fondness for this especial point. But, Gwen, do you know, you must not try this again. If any harm came to you I believe I couldn't live. Even now I am half stifled by the beating of my heart."

He took her hand and laid it against his breast, with his own tightly pressed upon it.

She laughed a little, but nervously, trying to withdraw her hand.

"Will you promise me not to ride so far again without some one—without me to protect you?" he asked impetuously.

Gwendolen laughed again, but this time more mirthfully. "That would indeed be a restrictive promise. I might as well say farewell to Colin at once, and prepare him for a useless old age."

"You know what I mean, Gwen; I long to be with you always. I would be glad if not a day or an hour need be passed away from you. Do you not know why I am here now?" he went on eagerly. "You do not question me or ask why I returned so unexpectedly. Can you not guess?"

Why, indeed? Gwendolen had not asked. In

the relief of finding him beside her she had forgotten that his return was wholly surprising and unlooked for. She regarded her cousin inquiringly, but she did not trust her voice to ask the question. The intuition that comes to every woman once, if never again, told her what the answer must be. She longed for the words she felt he must speak, and yet dreaded — she knew not what.

"Gwen, I came back because my heart called me. I could not stay away. I tried to interest myself in the business that required my attention; I attempted to find diversion in company and excitement, the usual programme—dinners, theatres, the clubs: you know all the bachelor devices for killing time. I thought I would grow accustomed to being away after the first day or two; but whatever I did or wherever I went, it was but a pretence of enjoyment. I was longing for the sight of but one face in all the world. I was listening for the sound of the voice that to me is the sweetest God ever made. Finally, carrying out my plan, I found myself booked for the north. I had even settled myself in the train for the long night journey, and was almost on my way, when the thought of you became more than I could resist. It drew me by an irresistible influence. I sprang from the carriage, took a cab to Paddington, and came down by the first train. Finding Myles mounted and just starting in search of you, I took his horse and followed you here. Am I a fool,

Gwendolen, to care so much? Am I worse than that in your eyes, knowing what you do? do you despise me? Tell me," he urged; "I must know. All my life hangs upon your answer."

The two horses, under the spell of the night, had drawn closer together, with heads touching in interchange of friendly confidence. The figures above them had also become blended in the one shadow cast, until a grotesque outline, like that of some giant wood-god, stretched upon the grass.

A faint breath of stirring air carried the sound of a woman's voice, accompanied by a clearly-struck stringed instrument, from the level below. That, too, was but a part of the witchery of the night, and one felt no desire to embody the melody or trace it to any human source. It seemed but a fitting undertone to a fuller harmony. To Gwendolen it was as unreal as the glamour that surrounded her.

What was there, after all, to prevent her giving way to the demand of her heart? Was it not beating in answering response to every word that Godfrey uttered? She knew why he had come back; she had known even before he spoke. She had realized long before that what had become the governing motive of his existence; but, O! how she had tried to blind her eyes and dull her understanding! Even to-day—it seemed a century ago—she had not been quite honest with herself. She had spoken of Godfrey dispassionately, almost coldly, saying what was best for him, what was

wrong for her, and all the while she was playing a part, making the hollowest pretence.

She loved him ; she could acknowledge it now with her hand in his, and the moonlight encompassing them in its sheltering embrace. She loved him as a woman loves a man who alone of all mankind can ever by her be called husband. She loved him with the accumulated strength of all her years —no longer the simple affection of youth, but the strong overmastering love of mature years. She did not try to disguise the truth any longer, or to hide it from herself. She knew that the one dominant passion of all her life had been, and must ever be, love for Godfrey.

The moon had already ridden far in her nightly circuit. Her way admitted of no impediment. It was a majestic progress—calm, clear, definite ; from horizon to horizon lay her path, and without haste or delay she trod the blue glory of the sky. The shadows upon the turf still showed every tiny leaf and twig reproduced in perfect outline. Even "the great god Pan" would have looked again, could he have beheld the shadowy mingling of hoofs of horse and head of man that the moonlight cast upon the earth. The woman's voice rose and fell in full rich cadence, while the clear strumming of the strings kept it company.

Gwendolen's pulses beat high. Life looked full to the brim of joy and beauty, if only it could be imprisoned on a night like this. Had she not a right in its fullest enjoyment, and did not this

right mean a surrender of her heart to this man whom she loved? What stood between? Love is not of necessity selfish, and the joy would not be hers alone.

That very day even Godfrey's mother had come to her, saying, "Will you become my son's wife? He loves you, and, more than all else on earth, I desire to call you daughter."

What, indeed, could be more natural? Would she not secure the happiness of all those who were dear to her—dear as life—by yielding to the dictates of love? Ah! but was this the question? What, indeed, stood between?

The wind blew fresher, bringing a whiff of salt on its breezy breath. The woman's voice grew more and more indistinct, and presently was lost in some bend of the shore. The horses pawed impatiently; having finished their interchange of good-fellowship, their thoughts turned towards warm stalls and sweet fodder. These young people were strangely forgetful—they must be reminded of home.

Godfrey's voice broke the stillness. "You know what you are to me, Gwen," he repeated. "No one else has ever been so dear, believe me. No one could ever be more cherished. You are like a guiding spirit. I cannot live without you. You are my inspiration, my conscience."

Gwendolen started. Could this indeed be so? His conscience! Was it possible for any mortal to hold that place? That implied a relation she had

never thought of before, surely the most serious one soul could hold towards another. His conscience! Was it given into her hands, then, to guide and strengthen, perhaps redeem, this man whom she loved? Was it her part to lead him towards what was noblest, even though her feet were cut and her limbs bleeding? Possibly there was a goal of right to be reached by him through denial and by her through the cross of suffering. She had not before realized the sacred possibilities of love. Was she willing, then, to put that goal beyond his reach by yielding to the temptation over which they both hovered? Could she, doing violence to every inward admonition, say: "Yes, I love you; let me supplant the memory even of that other whom you once thought you loved! Let us wipe out all that has made up your days except where they have touched mine! Together we will frame a life secure in our own happiness, free from remembrance and without regret."

Gwendolen could hear the quick throbbing of Godfrey's heart as he leaned near to her. His face looked white, uplifted in the moonlight, and his lips trembled, as though restraining by an effort the torrent of tenderness that rose to them. She dared not look at him. Leaning far down over Colin's neck, she patted his mane and pretended an interest in disentangling some part of its silky length from the bridle she held. Bending thus, her voice sounded far off and unnatural.

"Listen, Godfrey, not to me—mine is not the

voice to guide you—but to your own conscience: what does it tell you? That there is no place in your heart for me except in the old way. We have always loved each other, and to that love there need be no end. Its inspiration is our succor. We must consider what lies before you, dear. It is not for me to say whether it will bring the greatest brightness; all we feel sure of is that you may not, dare not, ignore or deny the plain teaching of your inmost consciousness. You well know what my wish is for you, and—yes, I will say it—if you love me you will be true to yourself."

"Do you bid me sacrifice every hope, every chance of happiness, to the mistake of a summer day?" he asked bitterly.

She turned her horse's head, leaving the plain with its depth of purple shade and fringe of olive, the silent water flowing to the flashing sea, the white-winged boats and the curling outline of the tinted hills.

The soft fall of the horses' feet was the only sound in the silent night.

Presently she spoke again: "Will you try again for truth's sake—for your own sake—to redeem your promise to Milly? Will you go to her or make one more attempt to hear from her, finding out in some way—there must be ways—whether she still loves you, and is waiting for you to come and make her your wife?" Gwendolen shivered in the night air. The words sounded cold and pitiless; but so also is conscience.

They pierced the shell of that subtle admonisher, forcing a groan from Godfrey's lips.

"If I do this which you advise it will be simply because you ask. I can find no prompting in my own heart to the sacrifice. Yet I seem bereft of choice: a voice speaks through you whose power I own and whose warning I am unable to resist. But if, after all, nothing comes of my struggle—if I fail—then, ah, Gwen!" he almost whispered.

She touched Colin gently with the soft leather of her whip, and he, knowing the touch, bounded in close even strides over the turf. Soon they were in the narrow lane, she leading the way, and then out upon the bridle-paths winding through the wooded park. Some deer, startled by the thud of horses' hoofs, suddenly left the shelter of quiet beds, alert and watchful with strained eye and ear, waiting the approach of a possible foe.

Myles, the groom, came out from the shadow of the porch where he sleepily awaited the return of his mistress, while Godfrey, overtaking Gwendolen, swung himself from the saddle just as she slipped from hers. Taking her hand in his for a moment, he asked sadly:

"Must it, then, be so? Will you send me away?"

She smiled bravely, though the stray moonbeam that found her face had never that whole evening long lighted one so wan.

"It is not I who speak, but the voice of your own soul, dear Godfrey. Good-night," she added gently.

"Good-night," he repeated; but he bent and kissed her hand with the same reverent inclination that a devotee uses before the shrine of a saint he supplicates.

Leaving him, she went in under the dark porch, out of the moonlight, away from the love she craved — alone with her heart's sacrifice. He, mounting his horse again, rode off through the shadows.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Godfrey had easily become accustomed to the change in his prospects, and had accepted it, as we are apt to accept those which better our fortunes, in a spirit of philosophy. There was much to be regretted, and still much to be enjoyed. Why waste time and strength in battling with the inevitable? There is little to be gained in consuming one's energy of mind and body over a past that does not admit of reconstruction.

Godfrey had dropped at once into the present groove without resistance or friction. After all, it was the life to which he had been born, and in all regards a more natural one than that he had temporarily embraced in the West. Whatever he missed of freedom was more than compensated for by the delightful associations of home: its quiet influence seemed dearer and more to be desired than ever before.

He no longer deluded himself with the probability of a return to Minnesota—that is, to live. He still owned his property there, though negotiations were now in progress that might convey it in part, at least, to his friend Alexander Hope. But he did not hasten the day; indeed, he hesitated to sever all connection with that far-off land. He

still said to himself that he intended to go back there before long for a visit, perhaps, and then he would leave it to Milly to decide what their future was to be. He did not deny his obligation; he only postponed the date of his visit.

Meantime, carrying out his promise to Gwendolen, he had despatched another letter to Milly, and would doubtless be influenced by whatever reply he might receive thereto. This last had been sent to the care of the Rev. George Boynton, in the hope that had anything befallen Sandy—even his possible death or removal from the farm—the letter might still, through the clergyman, be conveyed to Milly's hand.

He had ceased, however, to reason with himself, putting off for the present any more decisive step. He was content to drift along in the pleasant stream of old association, without questioning himself too closely or analyzing his more serious intentions.

He was not blind to the advantages he enjoyed: the *élan* of his position, the ready deference of inferiors, the no less flattering courtesy of his equals, all united to soothe him into an agreeable estimate of the change wrought in his prospects.

It was a new and elating sensation to have one's name solicited by every known and unknown society and corporation in all the country round, to find that its mere sound carried more influence than the ready generosity of men twice his age and double his experience. There was a certain satis-

faction in finding himself quoted as an authority on subjects hitherto as remote from his knowledge or interest as the occult sciences or the worship of Chinese idols. Without effort or design, he found himself already a person of distinction and popularity in the county.

Then, too, with boyish pleasure he became the centre of his social circle. Young, handsome, rich, he seemed tasting the wine of popular success. If memories crept in that for a moment cast a cloud over his bright sky, they were but transitory, and soon vanished before interests that had become engrossing.

He was not without regret for those days when sorrow had been unknown to him. If he could have placed his brother again in the position he now held in his stead, he would have relinquished it with thanksgiving. If he could have recalled those childish voices to re-echo in Lilian's desolate home, he would willingly have endured any hardship. His content was not born of selfishness. But these changes were impossible; he could not alter by a hair's breadth the decree that had enriched him through robbery. There was no appeal. He had mourned with all the affection of a true-hearted brother; he missed Bertie sadly from his life; he had been accustomed to reverence him as one whose opinions were beyond question, and had yielded him a consideration scarcely warranted by the slight difference in their years. He had dwelt much upon the elder's ability and the place he

held among men. He had often said laughingly that "he would like to stand in Bertie's shoes"—that is, possess his influence—but the thought farthest removed at the time would have been the desire to ever realize his suggestion. He spoke tenderly of his memory, sorrowing deeply, affectionately, truly. But that life, however precious it had been, was beyond recall, and why should one unfit oneself for living by too close an association with the dead?

They mourn best who live as they desire.

No, it was not a feeling of indifference to what had been that caused Godfrey to enter with zest upon the new phase of existence spreading out before him. It was in a sense a duty. He owed it to his family, to his tenants, to the social circle of which he was a member. Every moment was full of some engrossing plan. There was no end to the solicitations of his neighbors. He had already been appointed chairman of "The Tenants' Amalgamation Society," the president of "The Archæological Research Association," director of "The South of England Stock Improvement Organization," elected member of the "Society for the Promotion of Mutual Self-Esteem." He was invited to become president of the county "eleven," and was made a member of every golf club in the neighborhood. He was in demand in all the tennis-courts within a radius of twenty miles, if one could judge by the number of delicately-tinted notes that

reached him bearing the insignia of racket and ball.

He had resumed his place in his clubs in town with renewed interest, after an enforced period of absence from these agreeable haunts. He made frequent visits to London in the intervals of public functions and county gaiety, and took up the broken thread of many past associations. Of late, too, he had been making the acquaintance of his Scotch estates, and had for some time been absent from Bainhurst. But everywhere he found life full, absorbing, pleasing. He did not deny that it enchanted him. He could not realize that it had ever been less charming, so naturally did he respond to the new order of things.

One morning in Ayrshire, a few weeks after his interview with Gwendolen in the moonlight, he awoke to find a number of letters awaiting him on his dressing-table. He glanced at his correspondence carelessly, for he was well accustomed to their probable contents: a happy mixture of social, business, and begging appeals that well could wait a more convenient season for opening. But among the number which he turned carelessly over there was one that arrested his attention.

The superscription was inelegant in the extreme, though legible. It suggested the painstaking of one who but seldom resorts to his pen for expression. The letter bore the postmark of the Cross Roads, and was dated about six weeks previous.

With some curiosity Godfrey tore open the

envelope—the postmark had not failed to arouse that latent feeling—but it was now so long since he had abandoned all hope of a direct communication from Sandy that somehow the letter was not immediately suggestive of Milly and her home.

The habit of attempting to gather the contents of a letter by glancing at it as a whole is so universal that Godfrey made no exception to the rule. He kept the letter in his hand for a moment, smiling at the cramped chirography and novel use of the capitals and small letters, before beginning at the beginning and reading it through.

It was signed by Sandy, and as Godfrey had never beheld any written communication of his before, he was somewhat astonished at the want of ordinary education which the pages betrayed.

Sorroundings, as we all know, have much to do with our estimate of people and things; Godfrey was certainly not without this influence in judging of Sandy's missive. It could have lain on the unornamented table which at the farmhouse had served for writing, dressing, and most of the useful functions of which a table is capable, and not have looked out of place; but here, side by side with the scattered elegances of a gentleman's toilette table, the letter certainly did appear astray.

Turning from the signature, Godfrey presently read as follows:

"Cross Roads, July 10th, 188—.

"Respected Sir,—I'm verry sorry to tell you that my Darter Milly has changed her mind abaout

marryin' you. She sez She don't care abaout no Handel to her name, and woold ruther be excusd. Mr. John Godfry Alleyne was won thing, but lord golbroth is another. She can git along fer a spell as simple Milly Alistair. She sez she'll stick to the Farm awhile yet. She sez She never could consent to leaf me—viz—Sandy Alistair. She hain't got nuthin' agenst you, nuther, I'm bound to say, only She changed Her Mind. Wimen is apt ter. I never see won as didn't when they persessed 'em. My Darter is as well as could be expected. the passon's round a good eal. crops is good. She would hev writ before, only She's afeerd you'll be Mad.—I remain yours to command,

"SANDY ALISTAIR."

There was a general air of murkiness in the atmospheric conditions of the effusion that suggested an inky fog. A generous sprinkling of blots had been diversified with smudges of hastily-erased words, the soiled thumb of the writer having been brought into requisition for the purpose while the ink was still wet. Then, too, in several instances where an investigation of the dictionary had supplemented and corrected the more ready phonetic spelling of the writer, both forms had been allowed to remain, offering the reader a generous choice of orthography.

It must be confessed that the first sensation Godfrey experienced in reading this effort of his correspondent was one of amusement. The total

disregard of all the rules laid down in the *Polite Letter-Writer* produced a result that for the moment obscured the more serious import of the letter. He stood with it still open in his hand, exclaiming with a laugh, "Of all the strange old parties extant, Sandy Alistair deserves the prize! Now what on earth is it all about?"

He re-read the letter, with the result that his moment of diversion was followed by a quickly varying scale of different emotions. Pique—annoyance—mortification—relief—were the ruling ones, though, if challenged, he would have declared that regret existed as well.

"So she has thrown me over at last!" he was saying, as he poured the hot water into his silver shaving-cup. "Jilted by my young lady of the distant prairie! There is no mistaking the purport of the letter. All well enough as the impecunious brother of a well-known peer, but rising in the scale by my own right, I am to be neglected—rejected—thrown over, if it serves. What the dickens is the matter with the razors? I'll recommend Jackson to the first man going West, if he can't manage to keep home implements sharper! He manages agricultural ones well enough!

"It's all very well to say she couldn't consent to 'leaf me.' Damnable spelling! I wonder I could tolerate the old man! But Milly! Ah, she was different! That letter doesn't sound like her. I can scarcely believe that she was at the bottom of its dictation. She was always a consistent little

creature, and as innocent as a newly-fledged robin. I would have sworn that she would have followed me to the ends of the earth if I had asked it of her, and now she prefers that ignorant old man and her desolate island in the wheat!"

He glanced at the letter again as he wiped the lather from the shining blade, while his feelings again underwent a change.

"Talk of coquetry!" he exclaimed, as though addressing an interested audience; "it is to be found in the breast of every female living! It is a part of the feminine make-up as truly as a smooth face or long hair is a distinctive attribute. An inborn quality as likely to crop up in an isolated farmhouse on a Western prairie as to exist in a West End drawing-room. While I was there, Milly found me diverting possibly for the time; now I am gone, some one else does quite as well—probably takes my place. Dash the parson!"

A rather long gash under the chin witnessed that this was not merely intended as a form of words.

For some moments Godfrey was employed in doing away with evidences of suicidal intent. Then he began slowly to dress himself, his thoughts taking another direction.

"Look at Gwendolen," he continued, still addressing his imaginary audience. "She is the only woman I know who is entirely worthy a man's confidence. Catch her changing her mind like a weathercock with every wind that blows!

No! she is more like the eternal hills---something to be relied upon. I never knew a girl like her—never! So gentle, so considerate and unselfish, so high-bred and refined, so beautiful and so true."

Here Godfrey paused, merely for want of adjectives, not because his enthusiastic admiration for his cousin was in any degree diminished. He was so used to associating her with every thought and plan that it did not occur to him that his mind turned to her now with a feeling of elation never experienced before. He had felt the illumination of her clear spirit in whatever he did; it had followed him wherever he went, but always with the reserve that a veil of uncertainty draws. Now in a second—by no act of his own—the veil had been snatched aside, and he seemed for the first time to stand face to face with her in a rush of glorious sunlight.

He leaned against a chair while he exchanged his bath slippers for the latest elegance in morning shoes. During those few moments a hundred thoughts had crowded one another in his brain.

Doubt, at least, was at an end, so far as Milly was concerned. In definite, if ever so inelegant, phrase her father had finally severed the engagement binding Godfrey to his daughter. He even knew by her own message why he had been left in irritating suspense all these months. She had said that it was fear lest anger at her fickleness should cause him to exact the fulfilment of her promise. She need not have feared!

He had, indeed, been prepared to go to her had she required it; he might even have been won again to something of his old allegiance had he found her as he always had pictured her—gentle, faithful, loving; but changed as this letter indicated, could he be blamed for, or was there anything wonderful in, his rejoicing? Nevertheless, he hoped that he was not altogether a villain to feel such a thrill of exultation; but would it not be even worse to pretend a regret that he could not feel?

Gwendolen would not expect that. No, she was the soul of truth, the embodiment of honor. She was of all women the most adorable, the most lovable. In all the world there was not such another! And soon the thought of Gwendolen had crowded out every other reflection, as was often the case with Godfrey. In a few more minutes the mingled emotions called forth by the letter had given place to one only, stronger, happier, more enduring.

He had already resolved to go to Gwendolen: he would relate the end of that tale begun in the larch wood. He no longer felt the shackles of a false position, but, delivered from their weight and bondage, he felt that he had never before known the sensation of freedom. He drew a long breath, as though emerging from a close atmosphere into the wholesome freshness of outer day.

His morning toilette, now being completed, Godfrey arranged his blue-bordered handkerchief

so that the tiniest suggestion of the embroidered *chiffre* appeared, patted the pocket to make it lie flat, gave a finishing twist to his blonde moustache, and went down with good appetite to breakfast.

The problems of life were solving themselves for this young man in a very agreeable way. The meshes woven by himself, which had at first seemed of softest silk, had grown imperceptibly to ropes of conscious confinement. Now, through no volition of his own, the strands had strained and parted, leaving him free again to follow the bent of his inclination. He had at first scarcely acknowledged that the tie hampered him, and yet by contrast he now realized what the bonds had been. He caught himself whistling softly as he ran down the stairs, but a certain sense of decorum stopped the refrain half-way. It did not, however, check the pleasant smile of inward satisfaction with which he entered the breakfast-room.

CHAPTER XIX.

So finely strung, so sensitive is this instrument of our emotions that every slightest touch, every faintest breath, seems to call forth some variation of the vibrating strings upon which they play.

Godfrey's feeling of exhilaration was followed by many marked though contradictory ones before the day ended. Confidence gave way to doubt, and that again was fanned to a steadier light by some chance word or look of Gwendolen's that still dwelt within his memory. He did not doubt that she loved him—indeed, she had not striven to conceal that—but he did ask himself in what degree: whether as the tender and unselfish woman who stretched out her hands to all who needed sympathy, or as the one dear beyond all others because she yielded to him the source of all her loving-kindness—her true heart? Would he find an answering light in the depths of her steadfast eyes when he should come to her and say, "I am free"? Yet over all his impatient plan, over all his hope, hovered still a shadowy fear. And the fear was born of his own consciousness. What gift, after all, was he offering her, who embodied in his estimation every attribute that is lovely in

woman? Not the first fruits of a manly devotion; not the untouched gift of a perfect heart. Must he then consider himself unworthy of her? Had he forfeited his right to the mastery of her pure love?

The questions were new and tormenting. He had never before experienced this uneasy sense of self-doubt. Indeed, he would have said, and with truth on his side, that his life would, perhaps, bear the light of introspection as well as, if not better than, most of the men of his acquaintance. He did not in answer to his insistent catechism find that which caused him shame. Yet he wished there had been no Western episode to intrude in unwelcome shadow at this moment when his heart bounded with hope. He wished that he might forget every incident of that brief experience, and never more have cause to be reminded of it. But soon again every bitter thought, every uncertainty vanished before the dominant passion which possessed him. He was impatient and restless, longing for the hour when he might stand before his cousin with the gift of his love, saying: "This is the offering of my whole heart; take and keep what is yours; no power on earth can wrest it from you if you are but willing to receive it and to forgive me." His mind was filled with the thought of what he should say to her, how approach her, how listen for the longed-for words that held his very life.

He had a party of friends—all men—staying in

the house, but no embarrassing question of hospitality hampered his decision.

He would take the night train to London, and the next day, as early as possible, continue his journey to Bainhurst. Once more he would breathe the same air with Gwendolen, again behold the light in her calm eyes, hear the sound of her sweet voice. He would live again, he said: as though he had, indeed, burst the bonds of death's cerements or had but just escaped from a living tomb.

Yes, his brothers could well enough look after his guests; he did not trouble himself with misgivings concerning the propriety of his sudden move. The men would doubtless amuse themselves as well without him as with him. It was incredible to him (it had become so during the last half hour) how a dozen men of average ability and a fair amount of heart could go on day after day making their chief occupation the slaughter of innocent birds! They seemingly had no higher ambition than a full bag. He was almost inclined to call the sport he had willingly absorbed himself in the day before degrading! In fact, the word he used was the superlative of that descriptive adjective spelled differently.

Fortunately he had received word from his headkeeper that there would be no shooting that day. In consequence, he must submit with what grace he could to a few hours more of the uninterrupted companionship of his guests. But he looked for-

ward eagerly to the night journey, and the moment when he should be quite alone. He still felt inclined to drink in great draughts of fresh air, as though the breath of heaven was the only stimulant befitting his exalted mood. He scarcely understood himself, for he seemed in his light-heartedness like a man born again. Had he tried to illustrate the state of mind from which he had just escaped, he would have said that the continual reappearance of some unfriendly ghost more nearly represented his former haunted condition than any tangible illustration of flesh and blood. Now, at last, he need fear nothing; he was as free as though no tie had ever bound him.

The night journey was a relief. He felt that he need no longer mask his face with the expression of assumed interest that the society of his guests demanded. He need listen no longer with affected cordiality to platitudes thrice told, or to pleasantries that had never seemed new. No, he was at last on his way to Gwendolen. Even the steady jar and rush of the train were welcome; they but repeated the one refrain, "To Gwendolen, to Gwendolen!"

But before the morning dawned he was impatient and restless again; the journey seemed interminable; if he had had the power he would have annihilated Distance the sooner to test the question pressing upon his heart. But, endowed with no supernatural gift, he was obliged to curb his impatience while the journey was accomplished in

the usual practical manner: so many hours to London; a hurried breakfast taken at the station; then a drive from King's Cross to Paddington, and the supplementary few hours that carried him to the nearest point to his journey's end.

Sending on his luggage by a cab engaged at the station, he started on a brisk walk across country as the quickest and pleasantest means of reaching Bainhurst. Although there was nothing in the day to remind him of his last walk over the same road, he could not but recall the circumstances of it most vividly as he strode along, making short work of the miles that vanished behind him. Then, indeed, he had come answering some indefinite impulse; now he was on the way to Gwendolen, following a fixed idea that drew him with the power of certainty. There was no room left for any other reflection—the one glad hope seemed to fill every recess of his brain. Gwendolen to be his wife—his wife! Yet the words reminded him of something: a girl with beseeching eyes; a straggling hamlet with snow-capped houses; a brilliant full moon in sovereign possession of the night. Ah, yes! he was thinking of a moonlit night: the one when he had last taken this walk. How beautiful that was! and how beautiful Gwendolen had been, revealed in the moon's soft radiance! She reminded him of moonlight: so gentle, so serene, yet flooding his soul, as the moon does the earth's spaces, with a steady, even glow.

He could recall how the familiar landscape had

impressed him that night; but it was not more unlike the drizzling mist of to-day than was freedom from bondage. What did he care if the thin threads of rain drew together in an enshrouding veil that shut out all but the objects nearest him? What mattered it that the soil was sodden, and the trees dripped with what seemed an intermittent rainfall that soon had left not a dry thread on him? Hope was in his heart; no outward discomfort or discouragement could hinder his light step or retard his way.

Coming to the downs, which alone lay between him and the Castle of Bainhurst, he took a diagonal cut that would soon bring him out on the home domain. Indeed, from where he stood, for a moment gazing in the direction of Bainhurst, the towers of the Castle were visible on a clear day. Despite his haste, he paused a second on the highest point that his way touched, struck by the singularity of the atmospheric effect he beheld. The mist rolling in white billows over the undulating green of the downs, had settled here and there in the irregular hollows, so that banks of blossoming gorse curled above the pale waves like golden crests; they lighted the even tones of neutral tint that enveloped all the world and lay like imprisoned sunlight in the meshes of shifting mist.

Godfrey stood for a moment in rapt contemplation of the strange beauty of the scene, and then, as though its subdued loveliness were but another and new suggestion of what Nature held in her

"'*What the deuce ails you? I asked after Lady Galbraith's health. Can't you answer?*'"

treasure-house of beauty, he stretched his arms out with an involuntary gesture, exclaiming, "How sweet it is to live!"

With the impression still strong upon him that somewhere, in spite of the sodden path and dripping leaves, the dead sky and the gray earth, he had beheld a burst of sunlight, he arrived at the Castle. The house seemed deserted, so silent was it. He rang, and after a little delay one of the younger footmen opened the door.

"How are you, Charles?" he asked, passing the man, who tried, rather awkwardly he thought, to prevent his entrance. "How is my mother, Lady Galbraith, and—all?" he added, without regard to grammar.

The footman moved uneasily under his master's eye, and wished sincerely that he had not been the one to open the door for his lordship. His embarrassment held his tongue so provokingly tied that Godfrey glanced again at the man as he shook himself free from his overcoat.

"What the deuce ails you? I asked after Lady Galbraith's health. Can't you answer?"

The man, thus adjured, stammered out, "Yes, m'lord; I beg pardon, m'lord, that is just it. I had to speak the truth, m'lord, and I couldn't rightly tell where I 'ad houghter begin."

"Doubtless. What have you got to tell?" facing the pale-faced footman. "Perhaps you would gather up your wits sufficiently to say whether Lady Galbraith is ill or not, or if anything

has befallen any other member of the family." His heart was beating fast, but he spoke with his habitual tone of indolent calm.

"Yes, you are right, m'lord, it is the hold m'lady. She was took this morning in her chair with a stroke, something like the last; but James says as 'ow this is bound to lay her alongside the hold m'lord your father, asking your lordship's pardon."

Godfrey waited to hear no more of the stammering footman's statements, but with rapid strides was soon in the wing of the Castle given up to his mother's use. Where were his hopes now? What meant his beating heart? Had the glint of sunlight been so soon swallowed up in a dense cloud of blackness? He loved his mother well; she had been, besides the fond and indulgent parent, his boyhood's companion and friend. He could not remember ever to have heard from her lips a harsh word; the nearest approach to a disagreement of any nature had been during that unlucky few months in the West; but even that had been forgotten and obliterated in her mind, mercifully, by the affliction that had wiped out many things from her memory. He stood for a second with his hand upon the handle of the door, scarcely trusting himself to enter the room. He dreaded to see again that look of unconsciousness that had once before shut him out from her recognition. But the thought of Gwendolen nerved him to face what he had gathered from the servant's frightened face

awaited him. The scene disclosed but confirmed his dread. There was the doctor, called hastily from the neighboring village, lingering through the slowly-moving hours, not from any hope of bringing aid to the dying, but because his presence sustained the pretence of ministering, and kept alive that ray of hope we say exists where still there is life. Nevertheless he was, at the moment when Godfrey entered, standing in the embrasure of a deep window, with his back to the little group gathered about the couch, and with short stout fingers was drumming an inaudible rat-a-tat-tat on the dripping window-pane. He was not indifferent to the dignity of the personage stretched unconscious on the couch, nor unfeeling in his thoughts of the two young women watching on either side. But "it is appointed to men once to die," and the country practitioner had witnessed many such scenes.

Gwendolen knelt beside her aunt, her lifeless hand between both her own, and Lilian stood near. A group of frightened maidservants were tearfully gathered near the dressing room door, while the housekeeper in stiff black silk—as became her position—rustled between a table whereon stood a useless paraphernalia of remedies, and her mistress who would never need them more. There was dead silence, except for the subdued richness of the housekeeper's silk and the heavy stertorous breathing of her mistress. So had Lady Galbraith struggled for the past six hours, but gradually the

resistance grew less, and soon, without more ado, she would go out from life.

Godfrey stole noiselessly in, joining the group with scarcely a word of wonder or surprise from any gathered in that room. A majesty reigned there whose might can cause every human heart to forget his plans, his schemes, his emotions, his ruling passions, his every selfish thought—hope, fear, yesterday, and to-morrow. A mightier than any one of us: Death, the supreme!

And so Godfrey knelt beside Gwendolen, and waited while his mother drew those long halting breaths of which, and of his presence, and of everything else besides, she was totally unconscious.

Where was the gleam of sunlight he had carried in his heart? Every ray seemed swallowed up in gloom; and yet not quite that; for as he knelt, Gwendolen raised her eyes to his, swimming though they were in tears, and he thought he could see the light of welcome shining through.

The long hours dragged themselves into night. Soft-footed servants drew the heavy curtains, and brought the lamps, which they shaded with painstaking care, lest some gleam should disturb the heavy sleeper, thus, even to the end, making believe. The doctor excused himself in laborious whisper, and went below, where he was served in solitary state with a dinner fit for an alderman. Lilian had been placed in a low chair, drawn close to the couch, while Godfrey and Gwendolen still kept that last watch together beside the woman

who had been mother to them both. The night ticked on till past midnight, interrupted by nothing more important than the mending of the fire, or the coming and going of silent servants.

From the first it had been admitted that doctors' skill could not avail; but, in answer to telegraphic summons, two functionaries, with the distinction of baronet or knight added to their medical title, came down from town, assumed for a little that air of superior insight we expect from such dignitaries, and delivered themselves of opinions which, being translated, appeared identical with that of the less honored physician in attendance, and then, with sympathetic handshaking, departed, catching the two o'clock train up to town.

So the labored breathing received no alleviation, the dense brain no light from without, the slow-moving machinery no impetus from professional skill—heavier, denser, more clogged, until the wheels stopped. The medical man moved a step or two nearer; Gwendolen and Lilian sobbed, every one else was in tears.

But what is that flicker which rises and illumines all that has gone before, all that now exists, all that is to come, for aught we know? Lady Galbraith was not dead; but, raising herself with a strange strength, that a moment before would have appeared miraculous, she opened wide her drowsy eyes and recognized her children. Taking the hands that clasped her own, she laid them one within the other, her whole face alight with the

thought she tried to express. The seams and lines of age were smoothed all at once from her dying countenance; a smile of supreme content dawned about her lips, and remained there even after she breathed no longer.

The two bending above her knew the origin of that smile. In a voice audible to no one but Gwendolen, Godfrey whispered: "You see what her last thought is, dearest. Will you come from her sheltering love to mine? Will you be my wife?"

She turned her tearful eyes to his with a startled expression in them.

"Fear nothing," said he: "answer me from your heart; there is nothing between us now. I swear it, and I love you."

She did not attempt to control her sobs. Weeping for the motherly affection she had lost, weeping in thankfulness for the love which was now her own, her hand lay confidently in Godfrey's, and he, lifting her gently, led her away.

Weary with the long day and night, and worn out with grief and the many thoughts and emotions that had held sway in his heart during the past twenty-four hours, Godfrey, as the light was breaking, threw himself on his bed, overcome with fatigue. He could scarcely believe that but one day and one night had passed over him since he had found that letter lying on his toilette table which had so sensibly changed all his prospects. His mind travelled heavily backward, trying to find a

first clue to all that had since transpired. The better to assure himself of the reality of his engagement to Gwendolen, he got up and felt in his coat-pocket for the ill-spelled letter that he now was able to bless with all the strength of his love for her.

He readily found the letter, but it was not alone. That is, in taking the folded square from his pocket, he drew out a scrap of paper written over in a hand-writing he felt he ought to know. In his half-dazed weariness he could not for a moment decide whose this was or where he had seen the torn piece before. Indeed, how had he come by this unrecognized letter? he asked himself, still confused by the quickly shifting scenes of the day before. Ah, yes! in a flash it came back to him. He had the clue for which he had been vainly groping, and with the thought came the first tears that had risen to his eyes in all the harrowing hours of that night.

In the hand that had pressed his with that last supernatural strength—expressing so much because there was but a second in which to express all—a bit of paper had been clasped. When those fingers paled, and chilled, and loosened, there was left within his own, he remembered, this scrap of paper. He had thrust it then into his coat and not thought of the incident again; but now he regarded the torn bit as one might a message sent back by the dead. Some last word, perhaps, which his mother had wished him alone to see—possibly she had been

writing to him when this fatal seizure overtook her.

He drew back the heavy curtain from the window, the better to read what was written, and instantly he realized that the words and the writing were not his mother's, but Milly's. But how had they come into his dying mother's hand, and by what fatality was he confronted by them now? Whatever the letter contained, was it expedient for him to pry into its secrets? No; he felt that he would gladly remain in ignorance of every word written therein. Why revive in his breast the struggle that had raged without ceasing until a few hours before, when he had found peace at last under the wing of Death's angel? Even the natural grief he felt for the loss of his mother he knew had been tempered and assuaged by the promise Gwendolen had given him in that hour of parting. So wonderful is the power of love that it can carry us even beyond the influence of loss and pain! And yet this scrap of paper—he did not know what to do with it.

In the growing dawn he sat wrapped in his long dressing-gown, yet shivering with a sense of some new calamity. Surely his nerves must be strangely unstrung to be thus shaken by the sight of this girl's handwriting. What had it to do with him? He was overcome by the fatigue and the grief and the cold. But whatever the cause, this was unmanly, and for this last condemnation Godfrey had no excuse. What, after all, did it matter

what the letter contained? He was done with that period of his life, quite done, thank God, and for ever! He was fortified against haunting fears by a knowledge that was like a giant's strength to him. That ill-spelled letter—he could recall every word of it—gave him liberty; the love of Gwendolen gave him hope; her promise was life indeed. He smoothed out the crumpled sheet and read Milly's letter. It was better to be satisfied, and he had nothing to fear. A part only remained. There had evidently been some attempt to destroy a portion, there being no date visible, or ordinary heading indicating the person addressed; but from the tenor of the letter Godfrey was not long in learning that it had been written to his mother by Milly, as he had at once suspected.

"You will be surprised," Milly began, "to hear from me, and I did think that day you came to ask me to give Godfrey up that I didn't much care if we never met or heard from one another again. But I have changed a good deal since then, I don't mind owning. Trouble does humble the pride of most of us, and I guess I am no exception. This is to beg a great favor of you, dear madam: just to tell me how Godfrey is, for I have not heard one word from him since he left Minnesota, and please to say if he intends ever to come back here. He needn't fear that I will keep him to his promise if he wants to be free. I am not like that. I want him to be happy in his own way, even if I am left

out. But O ! if you could picture the desolation of being alone after having your days and nights filled with thoughts and dreams of him ! But I am alone again in this vast desert, with no way of reaching him or hearing from him. You surely won't—you who are his mother—you won't think it queer that I am longing just for one word that will speak his name and tell me that he is alive and well?

"I am certain you won't like my writing to you. You are so different from us: much above me in every way. I know you do not think me your son's equal, as you have a right to expect the young girl to be whom he would marry. But sometimes I think that Love is the only book that teaches without study ! By intuition I understood Godfrey, and could, I believe, have made him happy. And O ! think of what you ask me to give up, Lady Galbraith, Godfrey's mother, you who have everything at your command ! You ask me to live without light and warmth and nourishment—to give up sound and sense. You would take from me all that makes life liveable or death regrettable—for I love him, love him with all my heart, God help me !

"MILLICENT ALISTAIR."

The light grew stronger in the room, for the sun's rays shot up in long pale shafts of greenish hue, almost to the zenith. It lighted some shifting clouds that lay along the horizon, and changed

their gray tints to shining hues of violet and rose and pale gold. The trees were heavy with the night's downpour, each drop holding a prism of flashing color.

Godfrey said to himself that it was clearing at last—there would be a fine day—a pleasant one for his brothers to journey from Ayr.

How strange! The first dawn he had ever known in which that sleeper in the distant room had held no part! Yesterday he could not have believed that the sun would rise again on him, and she lie dead! Strange, strange! He wondered if Gwendolen slept; he wondered all sorts of things, except about the half-torn letter in the girlish unformed characters that lay at his feet.

At last he got up with a long shuddering sigh, and again drew the curtain, that he might shut out the day, now spread over field and woodland, castle and cot. He went to a carved cabinet that stood against the wall, and, taking out a curiously engraved flask, poured a draught of shining liquor into a glass, and drank it to the last drop.

"Pshaw, how unnerved I am!" he said, taking off his long robe. "I need sleep, that is all. A man can't expect to be master of himself after such a day and night. I will be quite myself after a few hours' rest;" and, in a measure, his prophecy proved correct.

CHAPTER XX.

DURING the days that followed, Godfrey had little time for reflection. Indeed, he did not allow himself to have. Whenever the grief of his loss pressed upon him, whenever other thoughts intruded that might at another time have asserted their right to attention, there was now the ever-welcome shelter of Gwendolen's love and the consolation of her companionship.

He felt that he had never known the power of sympathy before. Such tender light dawned in her true eyes whenever they met his; such yearning love sounded in her gentle voice with each word she uttered. Something of motherly protection is born in every woman's heart, maybe, with the necessity of love's expenditure. A shielding, comforting answer to each demand of pain or loss. No purer phase of all love's development is there, for free must it ever be from selfish taint.

Before his mother's death, Godfrey would have declared that nothing could have bound him by closer ties to this woman he would make his wife; but after the lapse of those first days of mourning he realized that a truer insight into her unselfish heart had been given him. She grew to be an in-

separable adjunct of his life—indeed, life itself—like one's throbbing blood and beating heart.

With lover-like extravagance he told her that he should die without her love. And she, answering from a full heart, would say: "That can never be, beloved, for I shall love you forever."

With unceremonious haste Godfrey would have urged on the day of their marriage. He seemed feverishly anxious to blot out the time between, and at an early date to call Gwendolen his wife. The wiser counsel of other members of the family—indeed, Gwendolen's unwillingness to appear unmindful of the memory of that dear one they mourned—at length prevailed, and Godfrey was obliged to hold himself content with an indefinite promise that spoke of the early summer as the time for their marriage.

Meantime they all, with Lilian as the head, resumed their old life at Bainhurst; that is, the daily routine was much as usual, except for memory and hope.

Almost Godfrey had forgotten that torn scrap of paper which had seemed to speak to him from the dead. As he had thrust the crumpled lines out of sight in the folds of his dressing-gown, so he had buried the trembling cry they conveyed in the depths of forgetfulness.

So much the better. Who willingly sets up a ghost with the premeditated idea of being haunted? Who opens his closet-door familiarly when he knows that just behind those thin boards gapes a

skeleton that refuses to lie conveniently buried? Far better is it to ignore that such a frame-work ever supported sinews, muscles, nerves, brain, all the beautiful mechanism we once admired, all the exquisite fittings and working we once looked upon with pride, because we called them ours, because for a day we loved them. No, Godfrey's way was best. He resolutely closed the door that might lead to uneasy remembrance. He would have double-locked it if he could, and erected a barricade that would have prevented him henceforth so much as a peep through the keyhole. He turned his back on that part of his life with determined self-control, and assured himself that the dead past had decently buried its dead. Whatever concerned Gwendolen was vital; whatever had to do with that fateful episode in the West was dead. If a cry ever reached him that carried on its breath the wail, "You ask me to live without light and warmth and nourishment, to give up sound and sense," he fled from it as a murderess might from the cry of an infant she had slain.

If side by side with Gwendolen's serene face rose the blue eyes and trusting smile of another woman as fair as she, he looked again at his cousin, took both her hands in his, raised the sweet face until his eyes gazed deep into hers with all his soul's passion, and then, with a smile that held the craving of his heart for the answer that never failed, would ask again, "Gwendolen, do you love me with all your heart?" and then the other no

less anxious one, "When, child, will you be my wife?"

For answer he heard the words oft repeated, "You know, dear, past telling," or the no less well-known, "Wait until the summer, Godfrey love; it will soon be here, with all its promises."

One day, however, she seemed struck with some new accent of anxiety in his voice that had escaped her before. She took both his hands for a moment within her slender firm ones, asking,

"Godfrey, what is it I hear when you speak to me like this? Of what are you thinking? I seem to hear far-off echoes of some past regret, or else the approach of some untold anxiety. Tell me, is there even now the shadow of a shade between us? You know I could bear pain, sorrow, sacrifice, any or all for you, my love, and never cry out. You will keep nothing hidden from me, Godfrey, but trust me as you would"—she hesitated—"the dear Christ, Who loves us both? I could not fail to do what was best for you, because I love you so, dear," she added, with hushed voice.

She was looking up into his face as he bent above her, with the calm, steadfast light of her devoted heart illumining all her countenance, and rendering it, Godfrey thought, almost divine.

"Gwen," he said, with a tremor of sadness in his voice, "I do not deserve such fond devotion. Your love is too pure to even understand why a man may scourge himself. You could not so much

as imagine how one might question oneself and find no satisfaction in the answer. Yet if love can lift me to you or bring me into your pure atmosphere, surely I may hope; for I believe that no woman ever stirred the best impulses of a man more surely than you have mine. Love, like gold, becomes purer when tried by fire. But why doubt yourself or me? With all the longing of my heart I am yours; with all the sanctity of your affection I believe you care for me; there let us rest, beloved."

She smiled again more gaily, releasing his hands. "Why do I ask such childish questions, I wonder? Perhaps as children do, idly, just for the reward of having some tale told over again that has become dear through repetition." Then more seriously: "There is no shadow of doubt in my heart, Godfrey; it is not possible to love and doubt. Only you are so sad sometimes, dear, that when you look at me I think I find in your eyes a thought you will not speak." But she added quickly, as though repenting of her own exigence: "Forgive me, Godfrey, that I should forget. Your grief would be mine even were I not conscious of my own loss. I ought to think more of how you must miss the dear mother, and know that your thoughts cannot always be with me."

For answer he kissed her, but the smile about his lips was reassuring, and she knew that beyond all things else he loved her. But doubts like these were rarely expressed; and altogether the winter

passed quickly, adding the months one by one to the long muster-roll.

No further word reached Godfrey from his farm in Minnesota; the purchase by Aleck Hope had been practically effected, though he had not yet entered upon the absolute possession of the property. Whatever detail of a business kind was still incomplete with regard to this transfer was left by Godfrey in the hands of his solicitors, with the proviso that he should be troubled as little as possible with consultations or decisions. Paterson was still retained upon the place as useful adviser and overseer. Godfrey from time to time received condensed reports from him concerning the farm's needs or successes.

But of late he had interested himself but little in these carefully worded accounts; indeed, he had been guilty on more than one occasion of shoving some of the last received into a handy drawer without so much as the seal broken. He would look them all over, he said, some day, and answer them too. Paterson was a painstaking, faithful fellow, and had always shown himself devoted to his interests. His endeavors should not pass unnoticed in the long run; only now his thoughts were on other things. He was going to ride with Gwendolen, or she was waiting for him to walk, or to read, or to sketch, or—to do nothing, as the case might be; for with such weighty engagements the time passed, joyously, let it be owned, each absorbed in the mighty trifles that fill

such days. Over and over again he would say to Gwendolen, impulsively seizing her hands,

"Never, Gwen, in all my life have I been so happy!"

The smile that answered so quietly told a tale, too, of inward content.

As time went on, Godfrey grew more confident. In all the range of his vision there appeared no speck visible upon the horizon. Wherever he looked, bright sunlight streamed down upon him, until his eyes were blinded with the light of his own happiness. Even the thought—if such a one ever intruded—of that brief experience in the West now cast no shadow, for, without will or design on his part, the thread had parted that held him there, leaving him free. He had no time for retrospect; to-day was engrossing—full of joy, to the exclusion of all else.

A gracious hand was indeed pouring gifts into Godfrey's bosom.

Every day he found new reason for rejoicing in Gwendolen's love. She seemed to him to embody every trait he had counted most attractive in womanhood. He became more and more alive to those qualities which rendered her fine beyond the quality of other women. He wondered how he had remained blind so long! His mother even had been more clear-sighted, for had she not long ago pointed out these very beauties of character which he now adored?

What infatuation could have possessed him to

entertain the thought for a moment that any other woman on the face of the globe could stand to him in the sacred relation of wife? Only with Gwendolen could such a bond be possible or complete. She alone answered as a responsive chord does the touch—every expression of the heart's desire. Even the weaknesses in his own character were in a measure counterbalanced or corrected by the strength in hers. In her he found sympathy, judgment, gentle consideration, a loving heart; in contemplation of the gifts she brought him he marvelled at his own good fortune.

In return, he promised her a lifetime of devoted love. He felt that he could scarcely wait the day of their marriage, so eager was he to begin this time of perfection. Never would there have been such an example of absolute sympathy.

Gwen understood as no one else could; they were as one soul, with equal aims and inseparable interests. Theirs would be a peculiar bond, holding all the past knowledge of each other that a family tie implies, almost the same family interests. Even the affection they had borne his mother had been filial in them both. It was a time of hope, anticipation, and happiness.

Gwendolen had never been so beautiful; she seemed fairly to glow with the perfection of health and loveliness. Accustomed as he was to her every tint and outline, Godfrey could not refrain oftentimes from expressing his pride in her personal perfection.

What wonder was it that Godfrey lost all memory of other days, filled with the gladness of his satisfied soul?

It has been said that no man's heart is large enough to contain the images of two women at one and the same time; certainly Milly would have found no room for her own tear-stained face in the shrine she adored. It was well she could not realize how pervaded that seat of affection was by the impression of one glowing, proud, beautiful woman. Beside that fair image she would scarcely have dared lift her bowed young head; into the eyes that Godfrey called "his soul" would she scarcely have dared look with hers, all stained by weeping. And yet, what is all this prating about woman's infidelity to woman? Had she but known, it was to Gwendolen that Milly might have turned with the sure hope of response; to her she might have appealed with the consciousness that a woman's love may preserve some sense of justice, perchance, while a man blots "it was" and "it is" from his ethics with one comprehensive "I love you."

CHAPTER XXI.

As the spring advanced, more active preparations were made with regard to their marriage. Every one at Bainhurst owned to feeling that undercurrent of excitement which a prospective wedding induces. Even Lilian could not resist the sense of joy that seemed to pervade the very air, and for the time forgot her own sorrows in the unselfish contemplation of others' happiness.

Some changes were to be made in the old-fashioned style of certain apartments in the Castle, rendering them more habitable according to modern, luxury-loving taste. While these were in progress, Lilian and Gwendolen moved to town, occupying as usual the house in Berkeley Square, Godfrey at the same time taking up his quarters at his chambers, not far off.

The wedding was to take place early in June, and in consequence Bainhurst found itself deserted during the first spring days, unless, indeed, one counted a busy army of workmen that had taken possession of the ancient rooms, brightening, freshening, modernizing some of the duller parts of the old building.

Occasionally Godfrey ran down from town filled with impatience to see how the work progressed,

or, as he thought, by his presence to hurry on the preparations. In suggesting even the tint of the walls or changing the detail of a single article of furniture, he was doing, he thought, something towards hastening the day when he should bring Gwendolen home as mistress of all. He was restless, impatient even, over every delay in the perfecting of his plans. The ways of paperhangers and house-decorators seemed to him inscrutable. He spent many hours in attempting to solve their methods of progress. The only comparison that served was that of the well-worn tortoise of classic renown, whose imperceptible progress has consoled many a one who preferred wings.

As his visits were usually unannounced and unexpected, he often had the fortune of finding the house deserted by every one except his own servants. A general chaos of paint, paper, and upholstering materials suggested on these occasions that nothing short of a miracle could restore the rooms to their former look of comfort. Nevertheless the work progressed—so, we are bound to believe, did the tortoise—until one day, towards the end of May, Godfrey had the satisfaction of finding "everything ready for Miss Gwendolen," as the housekeeper proudly announced.

With a light heart Godfrey returned to town that evening. Stopping at his rooms only long enough to change to evening-dress, he hastened on to Gwendolen, for without her sympathy he knew no happiness. He found her sunk in the depths

of a many-cushioned sofa drawn in front of the fire, indulging in pleasant dreams. She was dressed in a soft material of primrose hue, that blended with the lights of her hair and skin, rendering them more radiant than ever before. Godfrey, taking her hands in his, bent and kissed her lips. For a moment the reality of his happiness took possession of him to the exclusion of every other thought. He forgot what he had come to say, and all the practical detail he had meant to relate. He kept her hands close pressed within his own, saying :

"I am so happy, beloved, that I wonder almost I am not afraid. I do not deserve such joy ! It is enough to make one tremble. Tell me again that my happiness will not end, that nothing shall come between and hinder our marriage."

"Why, Godfrey, one would think me the most fickle of beings, and that only binding pledges would keep me faithful to my promise ! I consider this a very unkind doubt, and you shall be sentenced to a severe penance ! I believe I shall bestow all my smiles on Reginald to-night, as a fitting punishment."

"Ah, don't do that, Gwen ! You know what a monster of jealousy I become, if you so much as look interested in the man who sits next you. I know I shall have crime on my conscience, if Cathay puts on that ridiculous expression of satisfaction he always wears when he takes you down to dinner. I know that I am utterly unreasonable,

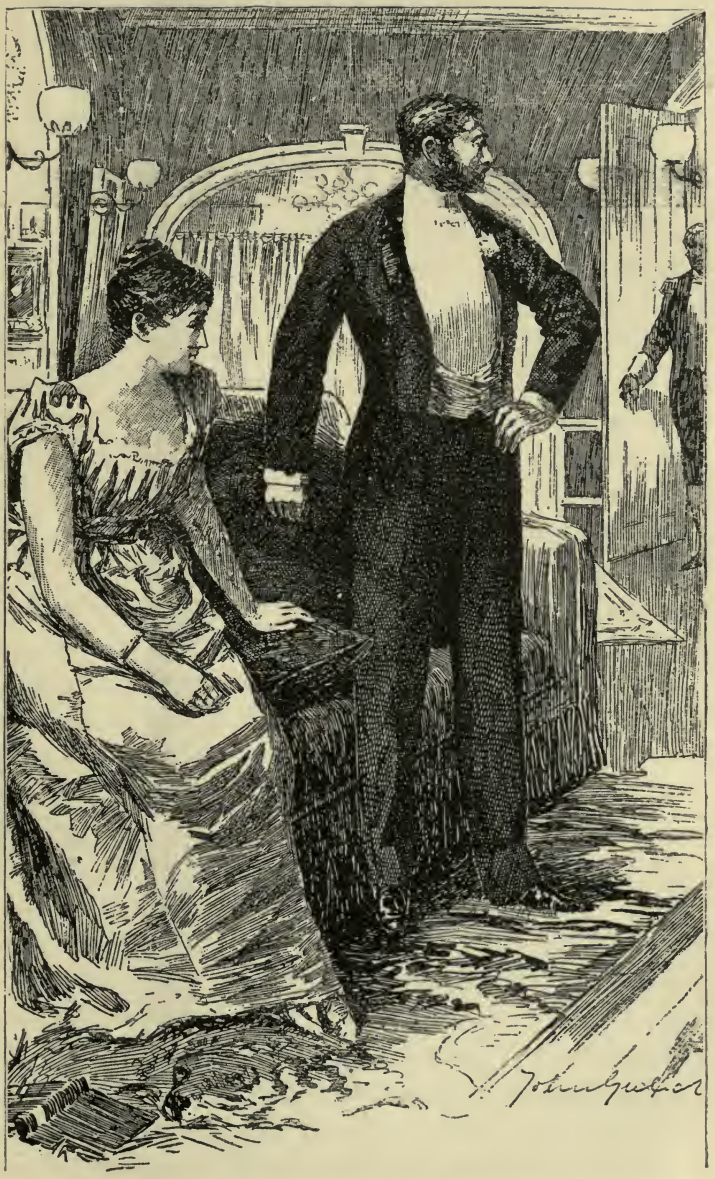
but you cannot believe how I love you. When once you are mine, dear heart, it will be different. Then there will not be room for the tiniest ray of fear to creep in, I shall feel so sure of you."

The firelight flickered and shone upon their young faces, revealing his eager, intense, almost trembling with the earnestness of his words; she with love glowing in her eyes, that held the deep, brilliant light of sapphires.

"You feel sure of me now, dearest," she answered softly. "What in the world could part us? Not man nor woman; not life and—I like to think—not death. For I would be part of you, if the spirit lives, no matter where you were. Cast away all fears, beloved. Do you forget all that dark time before I knew you loved me? I want to blot it out. I want to altogether forget it. I love to dwell upon the long years we shall pass together," she said tenderly, taking his face between her hands. "I have loved you always, Godfrey. I cannot remember the time when I was not a part of you; only then, dear, you had not felt the need of your other self."

"Thank God, thank God, it is not too late!" he said, with arms closely folded about her, and her head upon his breast.

A smothered cough, followed by "The carriage is at the door, m'lord," brought Godfrey to his feet upon the hearth-rug, with his hands nonchalantly thrust beneath his coat-tails, while the discreet James overheard the remark obviously addressed



"A smothered cough, followed by 'The carriage is at the door, m'lord,' brought Godfrey to his feet upon the hearth-rug."

to the surrounding air that "the fog was certainly getting into the house."

That evening was but the repetition of many others pleasantly spent, and would have joined the confused memory of similar occasions in Godfrey's mind had it not been for what followed.

They had been to a dinner-party composed mainly of familiar friends, which had lasted rather later than the conventional limit of such affairs. The hour being late, it so happened that Godfrey parted from Lilian and Gwendolen at their door, lingering only for a softly-spoken good-night in its friendly shadow. Lighting a cigarette, he strolled slowly towards his chambers, his thoughts agreeably filled with memories of the evening, Gwendolen always their centre. For the hundredth time he found himself counting the days until that one which for him stood forth upon the calendar as the most important of all the year. He had even begun a mental computation of the hours that would intervene before that day dawned. He wished that he had urged an earlier date for their marriage. He was possessed of an unreasoning desire to hasten the hours. Had it been possible, he would have overleaped the intervening time with a bound.

Entering his apartment, he was still filled with that sense of elation which always followed an evening spent in Gwendolen's society. He stretched himself on a low cushioned chair, prepared by the aid of smoking-jacket and slippers to continue his reflections. But thoughts are singularly erratic

things, and at times quite beyond control. Somehow, Godfrey's were as perverse on this occasion as those of any of us.

Instead of following the natural course of a man's whose one interest centres in the woman he loves, they became singularly lawless, and wandered to scenes in which Gwendolen had no part.

A stretch of ripening grain shimmered like gold in the palpitating heat of an unclouded summer day. A storm arose, sweeping over an endless plain, laying waste all that stood before it. A man's thin, high-pitched voice called to him in anxious tones to save his child—the storm would beat upon and destroy her. He listened; the very roar of the elements seemed about him again. His horse plunged and sank, and he knew nothing more until a girl's voice called him back to life. Of what was he dreaming? He must be insane to dwell upon these pictures. What did they mean to him now? They were of the past, dead and gone. Dead as last year's leaves! But he had forgotten that there is no law of annihilation. They were gone as only such incidents can be when outlived and swallowed up in a present soul-satisfying joy. He would not recall that time, nor associate it even for a moment with to-day. There was disloyalty in permitting his mind to dwell upon events so entirely removed from Gwendolen. He was vastly impatient with himself. He used hard words in self-rebuke, and accused himself of being unworthy his cousin's love. What comparison was there

between the two women—well, let him for once deal openly with himself—between the two women he had loved ? One affection had been a half-pitying tenderness for a creature born out of place; marriage would have been akin to rescue—never a mating of hearts. But with Gwendolen how different it would be ! Their union would lift him into an atmosphere never breathed before, that would be an affinity that must refine and glorify even the commonest acts of every-day existence. No one could live beside her and resist the influence of her perfection.

The thought of Milly, however, which unbidden had mingled with these joyous aspirations, was not to be easily shaken off. Godfrey found difficulty in doing away with the impression which this recollection of her recalled. He concluded that he would occupy himself with his letters, and so fill his mind with something different.

Of late there had been so little time when he was content to be absent from Gwendolen that his correspondence, with many other duties of a personal nature, had been neglected.

Lighting a fresh cigarette, he drew up his chair to the writing-table, and began to assort and arrange the innumerable piles of letters and papers lying thereon. Many were of a social nature, and had already received the only acknowledgment they required. Others, denoting by appearance their business import, still waited a convenient season for attention.

Among them were several of different dates from Paterson detailing the progress of work on the farm. These Godfrey laid aside preparatory to answering them in detail. One he perceived had never been opened, and bore a recent date. Tearing off the envelope, Godfrey glanced down the closely written page, expecting to find the same condensed report he was accustomed to receive from the overseer. His curiosity was, however, aroused by observing the unusual length of the letter, and also by the fact that Milly's name occurred more than once in its length. Why should Paterson refer to her, he wondered, and what was his letter about? Godfrey began to read more carefully. After the date and usual beginning, the letter proceeded in this wise :

"Since writing you my last report there has been a considerable change in my prospects—not but that it is a change sought after by me, and well enough liked as things go. I never could keep my hand out of politics, and now I call myself 'the willing victim of party.' In short, I am filling the place of postmaster of the Cross Roads in place of Jake Turner, removed. I do not suppose this has any special interest for you, excepting so far as it takes me off from the farm, and turns the whole concern over to the supervision of your friend Hope.

"There is a reason, however, for this letter, and one I am bound to say I can't clear my conscience of without telling you.

"You may recall that evening some time ago when I first made your acquaintance. It was the night Jake kicked up that shindy over your lost letter. I am inclined to think that he never forgave your getting the better of him, for he has been playing about as damned false with some of your letters to Miss Alistair as he has with hers to you.

"When I took possession here I undertook to have a regular house-cleaning. The last wash-out must have been about the time that the Ark rested on Ararat! Well, hidden away behind hogsheads and under loose boards, and in a dozen other out-of-the-way holes, I found scraps of paper written over in your handwriting. At first I didn't take much notice of the fact; but when I saw as many more half destroyed letters in a lady's writing I thought I recognized, I began to put two and two together. In fact, I may as well own up I joined the pieces in one or two instances, until I made sure of whose letters they were. This is not a kind of business I care anything for—the fact is, sneaking has never been a part of my plan. But when I got the notion that Jake had been tampering with the mails, I took it upon myself to find out, and to kind of patch up any misunderstanding there might have come out of it.

"You see it is generally understood at the Cross Roads that Sandy's daughter is just pining away. They say since last summer she has not seen a well day; it is generally understood hereabouts that no

one would know her for the same young thing you perhaps remember she was when you first came out. There's consumption in the family—her mother had it before her daughter was born.

"I hope you won't lay any blame to my door for telling you this, but I couldn't sleep sound knowing how the girl was grieving.

"The letters can, most of them, be pieced out whole. I shall keep them waiting the expression of your wishes."

Following this were some business statements, and then the letter closed.

Godfrey read it through to the end very carefully. When he had finished he entirely understood its significance, yet he would have struggled to put off a nearer view of his position, but it could not be long delayed. He had mastered the contents of the letter, and they told the whole story succinctly, definitely, without chance of misunderstanding or room for doubt. He had always regarded Paterson as especially truthful, and had relied implicitly upon his fidelity to his interests. The man had attracted him from the first, showing as he did beneath the rough exterior of his manner and person a surprising mental capacity, as well as a sturdy moral worth. Formerly he would have trusted his judgment in any emergency, and yet now he felt an unreasoning irritation at the man's interference. Why couldn't he have occupied himself with his own affairs? or, if he must assume the undesirable office of postmaster of the

Cross Roads, at least have permitted the dead of that unenviable district to bury its dead? Why need he have considered it his duty to unearth a mystery that was better left entombed? If Fate had decreed that his letters and Milly's were to fall into faithless hands, and thus all the circumstances of their lives be altered, why not accept with good grace what could not be prevented? But in any event, what difference could this discovery make now?

Matters were changed since then—decidedly changed; indeed, had the change not come about through Milly's own desire? Why should he attempt to gainsay the obvious withdrawal of her faith and affection as contained in her father's letter? It had been written, no doubt, at her dictation, and was he not bound to accept such a decision without question? At all events, he had done so, and now was pledged to abide by that decision. But that letter of Sandy's? What was there in it that to him had never seemed to ring with the sound of true metal? Was this another link in Paterson's mystery, and as yet unsolved? Pshaw! what folly was all this? Was he becoming demented, that the crowding suggestions of his busy brain should play such havoc with his common sense? He had no wish to linger over any such unwelcome reflections; he must put them away from him with a positive denial. It was worse than nonsense to spend one's time in attempting to solve riddles that held no interest for

one. What a meddling, bothering, troublesome creature Paterson was to break in upon this time of absolute content with his croaking suggestions! What had Godfrey to do with Milly's illness? Nothing; he didn't want to think about it, and he wouldn't.

He got up from before the table, and took down some foils crossed upon the wall, and began a series of thrusts and parries with an imaginary opponent. The exercise, however, failed to stir his blood. Had he caught sight of himself in the mirror opposite, he would have been startled at the reflection contained therein. The foil failing to divert him, he threw it down impatiently, picking up a book instead; but after a page or two had been turned, he realized that in the place of reading he had been saying over and over to himself, "I wonder if she will die!" So, throwing the book aside that was so stupid, he decided to go out. He would find some fellows at the club, and have a game of billiards.

Resuming his evening dress, he noticed the rose still fresh which Gwendolen's slender fingers had fastened in his buttonhole. He remembered so well how her white hands looked: the long, perfectly shaped fingers, the pure outline of palm and wrist, even the jewelled ring, his gift, that gleamed in the firelight. He could see her, feel her very presence, carried back by the subtle perfume of the rose. He pressed it passionately to his lips over and over again; the petals felt like the velvet of her lips;

the flower's fragrance was not sweeter than her breath. The rose seemed almost sentient, giving back his caresses, as though seeking to soothe his heart. Tears forced themselves to his eyes and overflowed, streaming upon his cheeks. In a tumult of feeling that conquered every desire for control he threw himself down again in the chair before the table. With his arms thrown forward, he sobbed: "Am I to be free? Ah! Gwendolen, Gwendolen! my life, my love!"

CHAPTER XXII.

If time did not "amble withal," still it progressed with even pace, bringing near the day that was to Godfrey like a sure haven after a troubled voyage. Ever since that evening when he had stood face to face with the unmasked reality of his position, as revealed by Paterson's letter, he had felt that the waves indeed rolled high, and were threatening to engulf him. The combat that he was ever raging with himself engendered a restlessness of mind and manner that was foreign to his nature.

He spent as much of the day as possible with Gwendolen, warding off by her association the unwelcome questionings that beset his solitary moments. There were many necessary engagements to fill the day, and the evenings were rarely without some social entertainment that required their presence. Not a moment was to be spent alone, Godfrey seemed to think in these days; for after leaving Gwendolen at as late an hour as Lilian, the most indulgent of chaperons, would permit, he still found excuse for not returning to his chambers and shutting himself up with his thoughts. He had developed a most astonishing liking for men he had formerly regarded in the light of mere acquaintances. And, indeed, it was observed at

his club that when he sauntered in at an hour that thinned the choice of companions he would embrace the society of men whom he had never hesitated to term bores, if nothing worse, rather than resort to the alternative of his own society.

He was the object of not a little harmless joking among the men who knew him best. "Galbraith has vowed himself to perpetual wakefulness until after the happy day. He is making most of the time left by way of a lingering farewell to the past. If one is known to ignore the creature comforts of eating, drinking, and sleeping, there is a common conceit that leads one to "*chercher la femme;*" in this instance she is found, but it is quite true that Galbraith couldn't stand much more happiness."

When finally Godfrey could find no further excuse for detaining his friends or remaining longer in their society, he still seemed possessed with a spirit of wakefulness that would not let him rest. He made the acquaintance during those summer nights of many strange phases of the great city which surrounded him. Walking for miles in and out of its thoroughfares between midnight and the early dawn, he came across strange scenes that roused even his preoccupied interest. One night he had wandered far away from any familiar track, finding himself at length in one of those dull and dismal streets that lead off from a glittering, noisy East End thoroughfare. It was long past midnight, and every light in the narrow street had

been extinguished, save an occasional street-lamp that already cast a sickly glare by reason of the first undecided breath of dawn that already hovered in the sky. The street was absolutely deserted, and seemed dark in comparison with the glare of that music-hall centre through which he had just passed. Not a footfall sounded, not a shade of living thing moved. Godfrey felt as much alone with the night as though miles away from any human habitation. His step echoed intrusively in the sleeping street, and woke him from absorbed preoccupation with a start of wonder. Where was he? he asked himself. How far had he come? It must be late; and he glanced at his watch under a convenient street-lamp. Three o'clock! What spirit possessed him to wander about in this fashion? He would have laughed at another man who thus tried to kill time. Was he killing time? Was it impatience to hurry on the joy of his marriage-day that drove him out into the night, wandering hither and thither like one possessed? He acted as though sleep were denied him or a place to lay his head. Three o'clock! What a fool a man can make of himself! Here he was miles from any quarter he recognized, and now would have all the difficulty of getting back before daylight actually dawned. It scarcely seemed respectable, and certainly not in accord with his usual ways. Jackson must consider him quite mad. He quickened his step, hoping to regain some street where a friendly omnibus might help him

over some of the way that lay between him and his quarters off Piccadilly.

As he hurried towards a wider street that cut the narrow one at right angles a young girl flashed past him out of the light. She was hatless and without cloak, but as she ran her fair hair became unloosened, and fell about her like a mantle of gold. As she passed Godfrey she uttered a low moan of pain or distress, but kept on her way down the narrow street. Once as she glanced back over her shoulder with terrified, wide-open eyes, something in their expression arrested him. Here was trouble of a kind that could not be ignored. He forgot his own haunting thoughts, carried out of himself by the sound of the low wailing sigh that had reached him.

There were many women like this—it was not a new sight; but somehow the terror of the girl's expression conveyed more than the usual tale of mocking womanhood. What should he do? To follow her seemed almost more unkind than to leave her to work out her misery alone. But the cry! He could not mistake that; there was physical suffering in it, if nothing else. He turned, following her at a distance down the dim street. He walked rapidly to keep her in sight; but before she had reached the opposite end she hesitated, faltered, staggered, it seemed to Godfrey, who now was near her. Again she uttered that strange moan like one in bodily anguish. This time there was no doubt of its physical origin. With a

desperate effort to save herself from falling, the girl made a clutch at the iron railing near her, but, failing to reach the support, sank helpless on the pavement. In an instant Godfrey was beside her, and had partly lifted her, so that she leaned against his supporting knee. She had not become unconscious, though suffering a torment that almost rent her girlish frame. She made an effort to regain her feet, but collapsed again into her former attitude.

"You are in pain?" questioned Godfrey kindly. "May I not do something for you? You need help; let me aid you."

"No, no!" she exclaimed anxiously, catching her words between great spasms of pain. "I don't want help—I want to be left alone, left alone to die. Don't try to save me," she pleaded; "I don't want to live—I've lived too long. It is a bitter world, a wicked world, a cruel world! I want to die!"

For the first time a suspicion of the truth flashed across Godfrey. Had this girl, then, this young frail creature, tested the bitterness of living, and so soon decided that she would cheat life of its hold upon her?

He knew little of the symptoms which medical men read as we do the open pages of a book; but it did not require clever discernment to decide what this suffering woman had brought upon herself. She groaned incessantly, moving from side to side, as though trying to elude the lapping waves

of some inward encroaching fire. Her fair hair fell about her, sweeping the damp dirty pavement with folds of gold. Its look, its touch, sent a long shuddering sigh through Godfrey's frame. He cleared his hand from the trailing threads, letting her lean without other support against his knee.

"Tell me," he said, bending near her, "what have you done that you should be like this? Tell me the truth, as you hope God will forgive you. Have you dared to tamper with your life? Have you tried to poison yourself?" One must have drained the possibilities of life to the very dregs to be thus early bent on giving it up, he thought.

She gave a short bitter laugh. "Tampered with my life! No, not I, but him! He has tampered with it, played with it, trespassed upon it, stolen, trampled on it, and thrown it away—away—away! Do not take me back," she gasped; "if you do I'll kill you!" she threatened, desperately, her voice trailing off into a groan. She had uttered the words between such gasps of pain that Godfrey felt not a moment must be lost if her life were indeed to be saved. A doctor must be obtained in some way, but not a creature passed, nor was there sign of life nearer than the wide avenue at the end of the street. He decided that for her ultimate succor he must leave her in comparative insecurity for a few minutes.

"Listen," he said; "I must leave you for a few moments while I go in search of help. Try to realize what is the matter with you, where you

are, and do what you can to keep your consciousness."

He laid her gently down on the cold pavement, and ran rapidly in the direction of the road beyond. All down the street her groans followed him.

This, too, was a woman who had loved. Young and fair and trusting, she might once have known the influence of a country home, with all its innocent surroundings: have felt a mother's love, a father's— My God! Why did he think of Milly? Such things were every day; only this one had trusting eyes and that look of confiding tenderness that called up visions he thought were slain. Had he slain Milly? he asked himself, aghast. The question seemed to burn into his brain. There were murders as sure as the brutal ones of knife and pistol. Was she really dying because of him? Paterson had said so. Was her death—if she were to die—on his head, as surely as this poor creature's whom he had just left was upon the soul of her betrayer? Had he, too, tampered with a woman's love—stolen and thrown it away? Who had the right to ask these questions? He thought he had stilled that appealing voice, and for ever. What did it mean that here in the streets of an unknown part of this mighty city—covering, as it does, whole miles of aching hearts—he should once again be brought face to face with the memory of his own past through the tragedy of which he had been an accidental witness?

He hurried on. Was there never a policeman

to be found on his beat when wanted? Godfrey wondered impatiently.

The street had suddenly become as silent as the grave, for even the dwellers of noisy neighborhoods must sleep some time. As Godfrey ran, he called in urgent tones that rang out on the night, and would have penetrated any corner where the "guardians" might be temporarily hidden. Rousing no one, Godfrey was on the point of turning back, urged by the thought of the girl alone, perhaps dying. Just then, from out an alley-way flashed the point of light he so anxiously sought.

"For God's sake, get a doctor from somewhere, quick, and come! There's a young woman dying down the street! She's taken poison, I fear—indeed, she owns. Can't you hurry yourself?" he called impatiently to the deliberate moving policeman, who, hardened by the frequency of such appeals, had shown no sign of haste in his movements. Coming closer, however, and observing from Godfrey's dress and manner that he was not dealing with the usual frequenter of the quarter, he stepped forward hastily, coming up beside Godfrey. He cast a penetrating glance upon him, holding up his lantern so that the light flashed in his face.

"Never mind me!" Godfrey exclaimed impatiently. "It's the girl dying on the pavement that I am anxious about. Can't you get a doctor?"

"Yes, quick enough. There's one at the station

close here, ready for just such cases. There's plenty of 'em in a year." He spoke coldly, for it seemed to him that the young swell was uncommonly interested in this chance case he spoke of.

"Where is it?" he asked.

Godfrey shuddered.

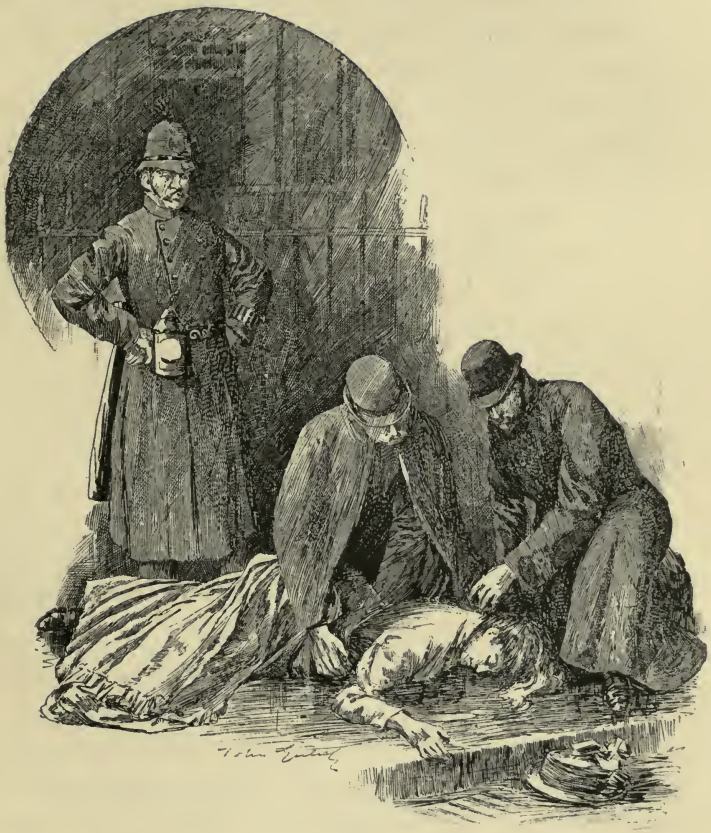
"She's alive! Hurry, man, in the name of humanity! Perhaps we can save her."

"Can't usually when they gets as far as that. They make a sure thing of it, being deserted. They takes enough at a dose to kill a dozen strong men."

Godfrey was out of hearing, half-way back already. He could again make out the dim outline of the girl stretched where he had left her on the stones.

The ashen light of dawn was trembling in the sky—just creeping on over the vast plain of bricks and mortar, and hardly yet penetrating to the streets below or lighting at all the hidden byways of the great city.

Godfrey shivered; the air seemed colder now that he could dimly discern the atmosphere. He buttoned his light overcoat closely about his throat, thrusting his cold hands deep into his pockets as he ran. What should he find? He scarcely dared think. There was something so awful in the thought of this young life going out without friend to save or woman to mourn. She looked so girlish—not as old as Milly—and so fair, he said, again bending over her. She was breathing still in long



"The burly guardian of the peace was already suggesting the expediency of a 'stretcher' and conveyance to the nearest mortuary."

difficult gasps that seemed almost to rend soul and body. Her eyes were closed, and about them were rings of purple that gave them the appearance of being deeply sunken. Her lips looked thin and drawn, showing the even rows of perfect teeth set in a line that left no expression save that of agony.

No consciousness was there now of man's betrayal, of woman's chill intolerance, of the world's scorn, or of Christ's pity. The dark veil descending had shut out all bitter memory of her short years, and had not yet been drawn aside to reveal the far-reaching mercy of eternity.

The doctor, who had now arrived, stood above her, uttering the cold formula of his professional opinion. The burly guardian of the peace, who had accompanied him, was already suggesting the expediency of a "stretcher" and conveyance to the nearest mortuary. The dawn crept down, and even gained place in the narrow confines of the damp street; the gaslight flickered, feebly contending with the encroaching sun; blinds were drawn up or curtains pushed aside with the lazy deliberation of those who rise from necessity, not choice. A slight stir in the houses on either hand betokened the mastery of that exacting sovereign, Labor; for without toil this part of the world at least does not exist.

The policeman had moved away again, bent on the practical details of his case. The doctor laid his hand once more on the girl's heart and pronounced it still. And so the day dawned.

"Had you any interest in the girl?" questioned the man of medicine, scrutinizing Godfrey keenly.

"None whatever, except such as a man may feel for a suffering fellow-creature. I came across her quite by accident, as she fell prostrate in the street."

"Hadn't you better be off, then, before the investigation and all the rest?" the doctor questioned dryly. "I can see you ain't in it; but it might be awkward for you to be detained as witness, or to have your name mixed up in the case."

"Thank you for the hint," answered Godfrey warmly; "I hadn't thought of the consequences;" taking in for the first time the unpleasant bearing such a connection might entail. "But it would have made no difference if I had," he added. "I should like to have her buried differently from women of her kind," he went on. "I can't think of her as a criminal, but rather as one who has been dealt a death-blow by some murderous hand. Could you see to it all?" he asked comprehensively. "I would gladly meet any expense that would be incurred. It is too sad to leave her with no one to care for her even in death."

The professional man regarded him again curiously.

"You take a lot of interest in her, seeing she's only a stranger. But I will carry out your idea if you like, and see that she has decent burial."

Godfrey took some bank-notes from his pocket, handing them to the doctor, who still seemed puz-

zled by his interest in the unknown girl lying at their feet. He tried to regain his usual manner, saying, by way of explanation: "I suppose it is the contrast that affects me. You see, I am awfully happy myself. I am going to be married within a few days, and it is the thought of the difference that fills me with sympathy in thinking of this forsaken girl."

"Yes, I see," from the doctor. "You had better get out of the way, then, for you will not be happier by further association with a scene like this. I wish you joy!" he said, stretching out his hand over the prostrate form.

Godfrey looked dazed.

"Ah, yes, I had forgotten. Good-night!"

"Good-night, though it's broad daylight, as you see. I'll see that the girl has decent treatment from now on," he added in a kindlier tone, "if that will be any satisfaction to you."

"Thank you again," from Godfrey, as he turned and left the dismal little street.

Reaching the broader thoroughfare, he roused a sleepy cabman, and induced him to mount his box and carry him within easy reach of his chambers.

Still shivering in the fresh morning air, he drew his coat-collar up about his ears, settling himself in a corner of the creaking conveyance. With closed eyes and determined will he endeavored to shut out from both bodily and mental vision the scene he had just left behind. The effort, however, proved fruitless, for the dead girl's face kept him company all the way.

CHAPTER XXIII.

The impression left by this chance encounter did not diminish as the day advanced. Godfrey dwelt upon every detail of the scene so recently witnessed with a persistence only accounted for by the abnormal mental excitement under which he labored. Moreover, the experience of the night before or the accumulated strain of preceding ones had acted upon his physical condition, until now the nervous tension took the natural revenge of bodily suffering. Trying to rise after a few hours of troubled sleep, he found himself unable to grapple with and subdue the feverish symptoms that already rendered him nerveless and exhausted. Yielding to the importunities of his faithful servant, he again laid his aching head on his pillow, glad to relinquish the intention of keeping an engagement of no grave importance with Gwendolen. In his stead he despatched a brief note promising to visit her before the day ended. Contrary to every usual impulse, no thought of turning to her as a refuge against the new perplexities that had arisen occurred to him. He felt rather that he would gladly shut her out from all participation in the thoughts that haunted him. He shrank from

associating her with a memory so opposed to her rare purity.

In fact, he soon sank again into half-waking dreams of that scene so vividly painted upon his memory. A curious mingling of the real and unreal chased like phantoms through his quick-moving brain, until he could not have told what had been lived in the flesh or where the thin line of imagination separated the actual from dreams.

The stranger dying on the pavement became Milly stretched on her own beloved verandah in the desolate distance of the plain. Wistful eyes were raised to his, but in them reproach had wiped out all the old love-light. By a sudden shifting of the kaleidoscopic fancies that possessed him, Milly was lost; but out of the new figures dancing in haunting unrest before his mind's vision grew Gwendolen, only now with a countenance transfigured by the righteous rebuke which spoke from its every line. Then this vision, too, changed to that one more definite, more lingering than all the rest—Milly dying.

Between uncomfortable moments of dozing and half-wakefulness, Godfrey took himself to task with what vigor of will he could summon, seeking to establish a better understanding with himself. He tried to view the shifting images in their true light and relative position. He endeavored to show himself the absurdity of believing that any fatuous occurrence such as that of the night before could have any bearing whatever on one's actual plan or

experience; but before he had reached any satisfactory conclusion the practical would again merge in the thick-clustering fancies of his weary brain.

Towards night, however, gaining a somewhat better control of both bodily and mental well-being, he determined to dress himself and go out. He would not, he decided, go direct to the house in Charles Street, but dine alone in some retired restaurant where he ran no risk of meeting acquaintances. He now felt the same anxiety in avoiding companionship that he recently had in seeking it. He needed a little space in which to marshall his confused thoughts in more orderly train before meeting Gwendolen. He was glad to be free from even his servant's anxious surveillance. He wanted to be alone, that he might still these restless imaginings once for all—working out a plan of definite action. Yet when he tried to spur his will to meet the situation face to face he still remained strangely apathetic.

Even the thought of seeing Gwendolen conveyed not the faintest warmth to heart or brain. The proud exultation he had always felt when on his way to her seemed lost now in one of complicated doubt. He was, however, beginning to separate the fancies of an overstrained brain from the whisperings of that voice which spoke within him. In seeking to control the one he had realized the other. For who can trace the subtleties of conscience, or show by what processes of reasoning it establishes place and sways our outward action?

A knowledge with another, and that other the Omniscient, works strange marvels in our visible acts.

A growing resolve was taking form in the confused, crowding suggestions that revealed themselves in Godfrey's mind. Out of the vague impression of the day dawned one clearer, bolder, more compelling than all the rest. As it gradually took form, standing alone at last amid the wreck of every other possibility, he wondered that he had so long been blind to its proportion or been able to resist its compelling power.

The waiter, handing him his coat and hat as he arose after his scarcely tasted dinner, gave him a look of uncontrolled curiosity. Surely this generous young patron must have been taken ill, or, at the very least, have come across something extremely startling in that newspaper he had so persistently read since his entrance, to have thus changed in expression. He looked older than when he had seated himself at the round table in the corner; indeed, the light of youth seemed suddenly quenched in his care-worn face.

And what wonder was it? Godfrey had arrived at a decision during that short hour. He now knew what he intended, definitely, irrevocably. He was going to Gwendolen on an errand never before conceived by him, conveying a message that would indeed shut out youth, joy—he only wished he could believe, end existence. He could not have imagined that such an hour would dawn, and

yet that he would have moved, breathed, and gone about as other men do. But where is the emotion that will clog the heart wheels!

Mechanically putting on his coat and hat, he went out into the rain, heedless of the steady downpour that had set in during the hour spent in the restaurant, and equally oblivious to the waiter's solicitous offers of cab or umbrella. Indeed, the rain beat upon his heated face with refreshing coolness. Making his way through the jostling crowd, he hastened on over the wet pavement in the direction of the familiar quarter he sought. With bodily sense he saw but little that passed around him; but across the limit of his brain's vision appeared, as though written in letters of fire, "You are a coward to conscience, a traitor to your soul, unless you go to her and make confession."

Arriving at the door, he learned that Gwendolen was in her own boudoir—a small sitting-room on the second floor, opening off the larger drawing-rooms. This was used by Lilian and her when alone, and Godfrey, as one of the family, was often admitted there.

He scarcely paused for the ceremony of knocking, but, opening the door, had his hand on the heavy curtain to draw it aside before Gwendolen's answer reached him.

He stood for a second with the folds still in his hand, trying with all the force of his will to nerve himself for what he knew was before him. The prospect seemed more than he could endure. But

"He beheld her standing alone near the centre of the room, clad from head to foot in the spotless white of her wedding-robe."

difficult as he realized the interview would prove, there were still circumstances which he had not anticipated that were destined to make his resolve tremble again in the balance.

Raising his eyes to greet the loved woman, whom he felt rather than saw before him, he beheld her standing alone near the centre of the room, clad from head to foot in the spotless white of her wedding-robe. The rich folds of shining satin fell about her in symbolic purity; the shadowy film of her wedding-veil encompassed her as with a cloud; above her brow were wreathed orange-blossoms, emblematic of the bride's chaste offering.

Godfrey caught his breath with a sob of pain. This, then, was what he was called upon to give up if he obeyed that voice he had resolved to heed if he would not brand himself—who would be her husband—a coward. Ah! it was cruel. He could not meet the sacrifice. How could he thrust her from him now when she was almost within his arms? How had he strength to put her away when in a few hours he would call her wife, bone of his bone, flesh of his flesh? Would anything justify a man in breaking a tie so sacred, pledging himself to a renunciation that must perforce include her in the sacrifice? He did not know. All that he was directly conscious of was the soft depths of her shining eyes, and the satin that fell about her, sweeping the floor.

He made no move towards her, nor endeavored to utter a single word. But the expression of his

white face startled Gwendolen. She moved a step towards him with both hands outstretched; he did not take them or attempt a greeting of any nature.

"Godfrey," she said softly, "I thought you would like to see me—even before our day—in my wedding-gown. I put it on to-night in anticipation. I thought to please you, dear. Are you not glad?"

As he made no answer, still gazing into her eyes with a look of unspeakable pain, she spoke again.

"You do not think it wrong, unmaidenly, to be so impatient for the time when I may wear the dress as a bride?" she questioned, with a crimson flush dyeing her cheeks.

"Wrong! my dove, my spotless one? What could you ever do that that word would describe? No; all wrong is left for others; you do not rest in its shadow. You are as free as God's sunlight. Ah, Gwendolen! tell me, love, what curse follows me that I cannot cast away every thought but one of supreme joy? What hinders me from mad delight in your loveliness, and in the thought that you are mine?"

He spoke excitedly, miserably, trying to wrench a satisfying answer from his own heart or hers.

Gwendolen came nearer. She had grown white to the lips, though they still tried bravely to smile as she met his eyes. But what she saw there changed the shadowy ray that played about them to a tense expression of apprehension. What she feared, she knew not, only she intuitively felt that some new

and dreadful experience hung upon the next words spoken.

She cleared the tissue of lace from before her face, pushing it back hastily without regard to the veil's filmy freshness. She had forgotten its significance, the joy with which a few moments before she had fastened the crown of orange-blossoms; crushing the lace between her hands, she waited to meet the blow she felt impended. Yet in this supreme moment she seemed less moved than he.

"Tell me, dearest," she began, tremblingly, "it is not too late: tell me what stands between you and me—between you and happiness? Is it that you are not yet free to love me? Let us not act the part of cowards and shrink from pain. If it is to be sorrow, denial, sacrifice, let us be true to each other—true to truth—and face whatever is before us with faith in each other. Do you remember that summer night long ago in the larchwood? I made you a promise then, and I shall have the courage to redeem it now. I will help you, Godfrey."

He had partly turned from her, no longer trusting himself to behold the light fade from her joyous face. With both palms pressed against his eyes, he tried to shut out the appealing love in hers.

"It is not too late," she said again. But he could not bear the pain her voice betrayed. He forgot his resolve, he no longer listened to the

voice within; all was as naught in comparison with his love for her.

"It is nothing, Gwen, nothing. Forget what has seemed strange in me. I have been ill, suffering; I am not myself. What a fool I am to give way to imaginings like a nervous woman!" he laughed hysterically, striking his palms together. "I had a strange adventure last night," finding an excuse in the most vivid of his memories. "I don't like to think of it even yet. Somehow the remembrance haunts me, try as I will to shake it off. A young girl, deserted, was tired of living. She took her own life, Gwen; I happened to be beside her when she died in the street. O, it was horrible! But why should I think of her here, when I have you near me, my beautiful one? There ought not to be room left in my brain for remembrance such as that. What can it matter what I saw last night, what has ever happened, what is to come, if only once you are my wife?"

He attempted to draw her towards him, but she took both his hands in hers, grown cold as marble.

"Do not deceive yourself, Godfrey: it does matter. The happiness of all our days hangs upon the truth. If you cannot find words to tell me because you would spare me every pain, then I must speak. The girl, so sad in fate, that you saw dying, dear, reminded you in some way of Milly—how, I cannot say; only I know a consciousness was wakened that will not let you rest. I believe a voice warns you that our marriage would prove

you a traitor to your best self. Could I, loving you with all my soul, let you brand yourself in your own eyes?

"Tell me what you have heard, for some news has reached you from Milly. Does she know of our engagement, and has she forbidden our marriage?"

Godfrey answered only that he had heard nothing directly from her.

"Did she reluctantly give you up, then?" she went on with the persistence of an examining lawyer.

"I do not believe that she ever gave me up."

"Has she, then, been deceived—entrapped? Does she still look for your return to fulfil the solemn pledge you made her?"

"She has been deceived—duped, if you will; but I swear to you, Gwendolen, not willingly by me. My letters were interfered with—hidden or destroyed; they never reached her. Hers to me met with the same fate. One I thought dictated by her, which gave me back my liberty, I believe to have been a forgery. All this treachery I now know to have been the work of a low, illiterate scoundrel, who became my enemy through his own misdeeds. Milly had nothing to do with the result; from first to last she has been the victim, suffering through no fault of her own. I have only known the truth for a short time, Gwen, and I tried to put the thought away from me, not hold-

ing myself responsible. But the girl last night—O Gwen! she looked like Milly: and I must tell you the truth: she, too, lies dying."

There was no sign of wavering in Gwendolen's set face, though suffering had already changed some of the youthful lines there.

"Godfrey, there is but one way open to us. You know what must be, my beloved. We must give up our hopes, our plans—our lives, if need be—to the righting of this wrong. That we are not immediately to blame for the misery of the result does not free us from responsibility now that we do understand. You tell me that Milly is dying for love of you. I will do better: I will live that I may show you how I loved you. You must not hesitate any longer," she went on, the unnatural steadiness in her voice betraying what her words cost; "you must go to her."

Godfrey put out his hand as if to ward off a blow.

"Let me speak while I can," she went on. "Neither you nor I have courage to take upon us our marriage vows, knowing that we betray our souls in the act. For your sake—for my sake—even if her life did not hang in the balance, you must leave me and go to her. I have loved you well—better than myself, dear heart, when I can thus bid you go."

Every vestige of color had deserted cheek and brow, until they seemed as waxen as the flowers that rested above them; only a steadfast light

burned still the same in her blue eyes, never flickering or changing for a moment.

"I do not believe, Gwendolen, my heart's idol, that our happiness or our life together ends here. It is a decree too unnatural to be real. There must be some other way—some escape," he added desperately. "Can you trust me even now, when I seem to be offering you as a sacrifice in expiation for my faults? God knows how willingly I would bear all the pain and spare you!"

"I shall trust you as long as I live, Godfrey dear. But you must go," she said gently, "while I have courage for us both."

"Heaven help us, my darling, I cannot!"

He had taken her in his arms, and the words seemed torn from him in spite of every effort at control. She lay almost lifeless in his clasp, for even her courage was scarce equal to the strain put upon it. Yet with a brave resolve to help him in the extremity of their pain, she made an effort to speak again.

"I shall love you always, Godfrey; nothing can change that. My heart is yours."

"I shall come back, Gwen," he said desperately, hoping he knew not what. "I cannot live without you, sweetheart."

"God keep you!" she made answer, standing unsteadily before him.

He caught her to his breast, pushing back the lace from her face that he might drink in every line, tint, shade, that he knew so well; then press-

ing her lips, her eyes, her hair, her wedding-veil which encompassed her, with kisses she could no longer feel, he carried her to a couch, whereon he laid her, and, not daring to look back, hurried from the house.

CHAPTER XXIV.

The great disk of the setting sun was fast disappearing below the slight elevation of the Pine Slope, leaving behind the golden memory of a perfect summer's day. The level rays projected from the West gave promise of like to-morrows. As far as the eye could reach an even tint of primrose painted impartially both earth and sky; for where the yellow glory of the great canopy melted to the lesser circle of the land the pulseless plain of ripened grain seemed but a materialized stretch of tinted atmosphere.

One could not have told in the veiled light where the one left off or the other began. Only, perhaps, to a person accustomed to the monotonous level, an irregular distance might have pointed out the slight rise of the Pines or shown the depression of the intersecting Creek.

Sitting on the doorstep facing the west, Sandy had for some time been attempting to trace this slight waving line on the horizon, but the sun's level rays were now causing his eyes to blink suspiciously. Indeed, the continued warmth of the still evening air, the wide area of monotonous landscape, the silence in and about the house,

broken only by the even click of Hannah's industrious needles, were acting upon Sandy's inward consciousness with a compelling power given only to such influences.

The accordion had dropped from his heedless hand with the discordant wail of one prolonged note that surely would have acted as an irritant on more sensitive ears. On this occasion neither Sandy nor his companion exchanged comment of any kind, Hannah being absorbed for the moment in the intricacies of turning a heel, while Sandy, between sleeping and waking, realized only the drowsy influence of the hour.

His head, pillowed against the hard casement of the door, was already nodding in convulsive jerks that threatened dislocation. However, nothing more serious happened than the entire neglect of the well-loved musical instrument, which presently fell with a thud on the doorstep, evoking a guttural expletive from Hannah that summed up her entire contempt for the sex of which Sandy was the condemned exponent.

His sleepy nods had at last become stationary by reason of a decisive forward plunge of the thin gray head, which henceforth found temporary repose on his own half-exposed breast. A succession of low, long-drawn sighs indicated the tranquil oblivion that now held Sandy apart from the thought of man. Hannah, having audibly remarked that "brambles and dew" (pronounced with a *j*) were preferable to listening any longer

to his unmelodious utterances, had taken herself off to the clearing behind the house, where she uncomfortably poised herself on the irregular stump of a fallen tree, while she again addressed herself to a proper division of the stitches on her bright steel needles.

How long Sandy would have slept, dreaming of no one knows what, would be impossible to tell, had he not been called back from the Arcadian excursion his brain was indulging in by a step on the hard ground near him. He straightened himself with a jerk that might have thrown his vertebræ into place again had it already become dislocated, stretched out his hand to recover the collapsed accordion, and, with an effort to appear as if slumber were further from his thoughts than dreams of Mahomet, questioned sleepily:

"Is that you, Hanner? I was jest a thinkin' of shuttin' up. 'Pears as how they's a kinder chill in my bones now the sun's sot. Ya-as, I'm a-comin'," in answer to the peremptory summons he expected would follow.

He got up slowly, stretching himself like a sleepy cat, and, with the accordion pressed between his hand and thin ribs, turned to go in. Disappointed, perhaps, at having no rejoinder from Hannah, he looked slowly about him, as if to perceive the thing that could hold her voluble tongue in check, and encountered the eyes, not many paces off, of the one he had been wont to call Godfrey Alleyne.

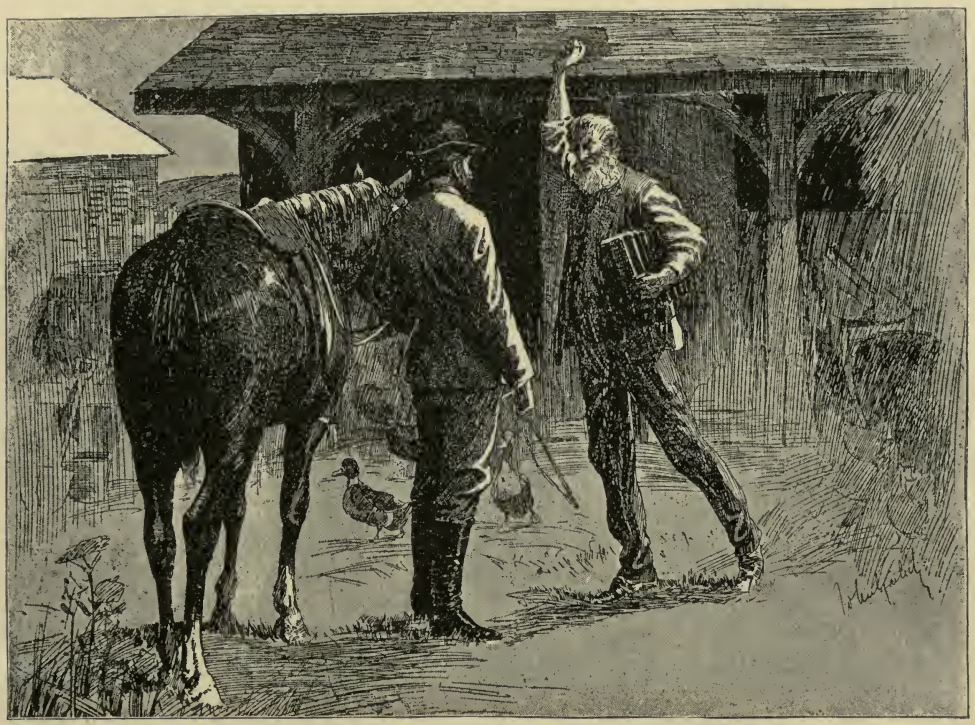
In the half-light of the golden dusk Godfrey stood waiting the old man's recognition.

Sandy, stepping down one step until he was on a level with what he considered an apparition, made a thrust at him with his disengaged hand, as though he would test the reality of flesh or shade as now appeared. Godfrey, scarcely knowing what advance to make, took refuge in the commonplace, that haven that waits to shelter those who wade in heroic depths.

"Good-evening, Mr. Alistair," he ventured, as though terminating a customary ride by an expected welcome from his host.

Sandy pulled in his hand; all doubt vanished. Those accents were too well known and the unusual inflection too well remembered for any question to remain as to Godfrey's actual presence in the flesh. Sandy knew his visitor. There he stood—the man who had invaded his home, who had ensnared the innocent heart of his only daughter, who had wooed and won her, had appeared as her affianced husband, and then deserted her without word or reason with the heartlessness of a villain, the cold-blooded insincerity of a libertine. All the distrust of the past months, all the growing resentment that had possessed Sandy during the time of Milly's unhappiness and suffering, rose within him now in a surge of unexpected vehemence.

His withered frame appeared to expand with righteous wrath. His figure straightened until



"'*You* ——— *liar! What are you doin' on my premises?*'"

he towered in bony angularity above his visitor's bowed head. His steel-blue eyes flashed with a fire that had lain so long unkindled that no one would have recognized in them now their usual half-quizzical, half-pathetic expression. Standing with his fist raised as if to strike, he uttered the first oath Godfrey had ever heard from his lips.

"You ——— liar! What are you doin' on my premises? How dare you come sneakin' here after what we know abaout you? They ain't no words in the hull of Webster's Unabridged to tell you half how I despise you! You've had yer last day of wormin' inter honest folk's houses and stealin' out the treasure, if I've got any say in the matter. We ain't much, I dare say, out here on the plains, but I'd ruther a durned heap have my conscience to live 'longside of day in and day out, than that of some that holds theirsel's several pegs above us. We ain't got white hands mebbe, but they's clean fer all that. We ain't got soft ways and melojewous voices, but we're honest, and thar's al'ays the accordion to fall back on when thar's need of music. I don't know what ye're here for; 'pears like as if 'twould most ha' been more decent to ha' staid away. I did hope I'd never sot eyes on you, back or front, till doomsday. But now you air here you may as well hear what I think o' you, you cowardly villain! What do you want here, anyway? And what ha' you come all the way back to the West fer, just to make other folks sw'ar? Ain't Great Britain big enough to hold you?"

He paused, out of breath; but the fire did not die from his flashing eye. In spite of himself, Godfrey could scarcely meet their indignant flame.

"I have come here with no impertinent intention, Mr. Alistair," he began quietly. "I wished to satisfy myself about—your daughter. I heard that she was ill, and I imagined—you will pardon me—I imagined I might have had something unwittingly to do with her illness."

"You've come consid'able distance to arsk after her health," ejaculated Sandy contemptuously, narrowing his eyes. "And ruther late in the day, too, I don't mind mentionin', considerin' letters and the mail goin' purty reg'lar, they tell me, 'tween here and your place. You ain't a fust-rate correspondent, as letters goes," he remarked, subsiding into sarcastic sallies. "You wouldn't, mebbe, be called upon to act as secretary to the Farmers' Home Alliance; ef ye're did 'twould bust as sure as a bladder."

"I have no doubt but what my action has appeared singular to you, Mr. Alistair, and I cannot wonder at some of your indignation against me; but when you accuse me of wilfully bringing trouble upon you or wronging your daughter, I must defend myself. I have come here with honest intentions, ready to repair so far as I may the unhappy results of treachery not my own. I cannot be held responsible for what has passed here without my knowledge. From your own standpoint you are right in defending your daughter, only,

unhappily for me, that standpoint is an enlightened one, and admits of misconception. If I had wilfully robbed your daughter of her affection and then deserted her, I should deserve all the epithets you have seen fit to apply to me. I do not resent them or retaliate because I know you are ignorant of the true facts of the case."

Godfrey had recovered his momentary lapse from self-possession, and now faced the old man with eyes as bright as his own. He was ready to carry out to the letter, if need be, his design in coming here, but he did not propose to let Sandy imagine himself justified in the furious avalanche of words hurled at him.

"If you will permit me I will show you how a misunderstanding sprang up and grew between Milly and me that neither of us was to blame for. You have perhaps heard of the circumstances that recalled me unexpectedly to England, and placed me in a position I could not desert without danger to my mother's life, and perplexity to those dependent on me. I had no thought when I last saw Milly of leaving Minnesota, or of being called upon to fill the position I now hold."

"I've heerd tell as how you'd changed your name, and is now called Lord Galbraith," muttered Sandy, eyeing Godfrey furtively, as though some such announcement might perchance be found emblazoned on the collar of his coat.

"It was all surprising, sad, and new. Many things were required at my hands that never had

been contemplated by me before. I became engrossed in my life, but yet had no idea of separating myself from Milly or not returning finally to the West. As time went on and I heard nothing from her—"

"You must. She writ—more letters than ever I put in the post-office 'fore in all my days," interrupted Sandy.

"Yes, I know. But not a letter of hers reached me, not a line, not a message. I wrote to you for news of her. I sent letters to the care of others that they might not miscarry."

"Um!" ejaculated Sandy.

"I did all that man could do to hear from her or about her; but never, until one morning, many months after my return to England, did a single line reach me. That letter purported to come from you, was signed with your name, and told me in plain words that your daughter desired her freedom, and no longer considered herself bound to me by our engagement."

For the second time within an hour Sandy was betrayed into an unusual oath.

"There is no occasion to enter upon what followed," continued Godfrey; "it does not concern us now. I acted upon the unmistakable dismissal, no longer writing to or expecting to hear from Milly. Meantime a new and strange revelation was made to me, one that startled me from any dream of content I was indulging in, one that has shaken my life to the foundation, changing every

purpose I held. Through Paterson (you will perhaps recall that he remained on my farm after my departure until he was made postmaster of the Cross Roads) I became aware of the suppression of all my letters to Milly, and of the destruction of hers to me. None ever reached their destination that were consigned to the custody of the former postmaster. Torn pieces, fragments of writing that would have changed all the aspect of our lives, I now possess; but of what avail are they, unless, indeed, they serve to restore me in your estimation as an honorable man, and possibly save Milly from further distress? You ask what I am doing here. I have come to make what restitution I may, and I hope you at least will give me credit for my intention. If you will suggest what should be done to compensate for the trouble I have unwittingly brought upon you and your daughter, you will find me ready to meet your desire."

"They ain't no talk of damages," Sandy began doubtingly, the whole question appearing to him now in so different a light from any he had hitherto viewed it in, that he could scarcely follow the rapid recital of his visitor further than the material grasping of the words he uttered. "I ain't layin' no claim fer balance to a broken heart," he continued. "No, they ain't no 'count of that nater to settle 'tween us. I'm kinder thinkin' now that I've cooled down that mebbe they ain't no justice in my cuttin' up so rough and ridin' my high horse 'fore I discivered just how things stood. After

all you wa'n't ter blame fer thinkin' the gurl jilted you. It looked like it. I'm durned if I can quite see where my part comes in. But I do say, and I'll stick to it, that if you had come along abaout that time when Milly lay night and day on her bed up-stairs, if you had arriv' while her baby-face lay against them pillars as white as one of them, if I had beheld you when the smile she tried to give her old daddy ended in a sob that nigh broke his heart, and if you could have knowed the hard thoughts that riz in this old brain, keepin' it awake all night, and half-asleep all day, you'd ha' knowed suthin' abaout what led up to your warm welcome here to-night. A man can't be blamed fer fergettin' himself now and then, when he ain't got but one little gurl in all the world, and he seen her a-dying before his eyes, with no way of rightin' the wrong that he thought was a-killin' her."

The fire had all died out from the old man's eyes, and again they were raised to Godfrey's, as in the old days, with a pathetic expression of dependence. Godfrey could not meet them without a gathering moisture in his own.

"I hope Milly is better," he said gently, by way of calling Sandy back to the present.

"Better," he repeated, as though still half-dazed by his reflections. "I don't know ; I hope so. I ain't got her no longer."

"What do you mean ?"

Godfrey clutched the old man's thinly-clad arm with a grasp that made him wince.

"I mean jest ex-actly—what—I—say," answered Sandy, disengaging his arm. "She ain't with me no more. She's gone."

"Gone where?"

"Wa'l, away," with a distant nod of the kind that might have meant that "distant bourne" or the nearer vicinity of the Cross Roads.

Godfrey breathed hard. He did not know what vista opened before him, only for a moment his heart stood still.

"You don't mean—dead?" he asked in an awed whisper.

"Dead, man alive! What are you talkin' abaout? I should think not; she's gone away fer her health."

"Alone?"

"I should smile."

"With whom?"

"Why, don't ye know? With the pa'son. Ain't you heerd nothin' abaout their marriage nor nothin'?" with a compassionate sympathy for such dense abysms of ignorance. "Why, he kep' comin' right along all the time she lay sick, and was a-bringin' posies and a-readin' hymns and other books of like description, till one day I see the fust glimmer o' change come into her purty face. He had brought a nice lot of volum's along, and was a-showin' her one all full of picters of the old country. Purty soon he said to her, 'How would you like to see all them handsome water-fulls and peaked mountains all painted pu'ple and

white and gold ?' Then she jest turned over and cried a little; but when she showed up agen I could have sworn they was a wee little mite of a dimple come back to its home jest alongside her purty mouth. 'Twa'n't long after the hull thing was fixed up. Milly grew better straight along after that, till nigh a month ago, when she was married, and sailed from Boston with her husband to find them peaks and waterfulls."

Godfrey drew his breath sharply. The news, so unlike what he had anticipated, seemed almost more startling than that he had braced himself to hear. Had Milly indeed been dead, as he at first feared, he would only have experienced the fulfilment of the dread that had kept him company for weeks past. But to have the fear, which had dogged his footsteps by day and disturbed his dreams by night, thus suddenly vanish, and in its place find freedom of will, action, and conscience, was like a vision of sunlight after years of blind groping in the dark.

For the moment he lost sight of his companion, gazing far away over the trackless plain of yellow grain. In that moment he seemed to have been born again, so freely his heart bounded to meet his soul's joy.

He had found the answer to all his perplexities, and with it came a leaping of the heart's blood that made life tingle within him even to the very finger-tips.

His silence perplexed Sandy, and caused him to

recollect their present relative positions. Regarding the well-formed, clear-eyed, stalwart young Englishman, and remembering that he had no further cause for resentment, he assumed again something of his natural manner and kindly disposition.

"You won't be goin' back to-night, I'll warrant. You'll want to come in and make yerself to home for the night. The house ain't what it used to be, I'm bound to admit; but Hanner's abaout somewhars, and will fix yer up comfort'ble. She'll forgive you a sight sooner (and I'm bound to tell you she's been consid'ble sour on you) if she has to bustle round and get things inter shape then if she jest sot down with a chance to jaw fer an hour on end."

"I shall not come in, thank you, Mr. Alistair. I shall be getting back. It is particularly necessary; and you know I always used to like riding in the cool of the night."

This direct reference to days that they had shared evidently produced a further mollifying influence upon Sandy. He held out his thin hand with a gesture that covered every lingering doubt as to his entire forgiveness.

"If I have done you wrong, Godfrey, I hope you'll find it in your heart to forgive an old man. You can see fer yerself how 'twas—my only little gurl, and she jest pinin' away. It's turned out happier than I ever tho't 'twould."

Godfrey took the hand almost reverently in his own as he said:

"Surely I have nothing to forgive. If you can forget what has brought sorrow to us both and restore me in your estimation, I shall reverence you and be proud to call you friend to the latest day of my life. I can't tell when I may see you again; my life will be passed far from here, but wherever I am I shall always wish for you and yours a happy and long life. Good-bye."

He mounted his horse, leaning over once more to take the old man's hand in his, and, with a smile that held both cheer and the lingering regret of farewell, rode off in the direction of the Cross Roads.

The golden west changed to dull amethyst and then to royal purple. The plain grew dark, until the warm tint of the yellow stalks turned to an indefinite white sheet, that stretched to meet a nearer horizon. Stars one by one came out in the heavenly blue, lighting with soft rays the way that led towards Gwendolen.

THE END.

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